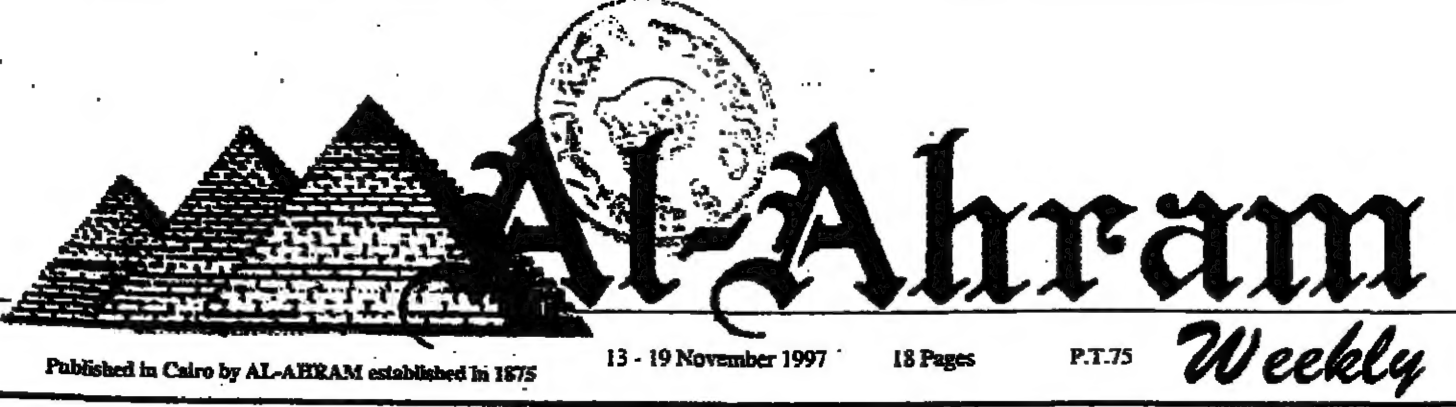
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Mubarak, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

Unity talks

PALESTINIAN President Yasser Arafat met Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and other leaders of the Palestinian Islamist group, Hamas, on Tuesday, in what was described by participants as a social visit. Abdel-Aziz Al-Rantissi, a leading Hamas figure, said more meetings will be held to pave the way for national dialogue, Reuters said.

In their meeting in Gaza, held at the Hamas leader's request, both sides agreed to avoid a split among Palestinians. Zakaria Agha, a member of the PLO Executive Committee, said Yassin pledged not to challenge Arafat as Palestinian leader and accepted the Palestinian Authority as the only authority representing the Palestinians.

Arafat has recently signalled that he might reopen some of the Hamas institutions closed last September under Israeli pressure and has not excluded Hamas participation in government.

Clinton snub

US PRESIDENT Bill Clinton was expected to meet Jordan's King Hussein at the White House but has refused to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu during his forthcoming US visit starting Sunday.

US officials told Reuters that the Clinton-Hussein meeting will be held before the US president departs for a trip on Friday to California.

King Hussein has been undergoing medical tests at the Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

The White House meeting will take place just as US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright makes another attempt to get the Middle East peace process back on track when she meets Netanyahu in London on Friday and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Switzerland on Saturday.

Death of a playwright

SAADEDDIN Wahba, president of the Arab Artists' Union and of the Egyptian Writers' Union, director of the Cairo International Film Festival, leading playwright, theatre critic and journalist, died on Tuesday of heart and lung complications stemming from cancer. He was 72.

At Wahba's funeral, yesterday, dozens of Egyptian intellectuals turned out to mourn his passing.

Wahba graduated from the Police Academy in 1949, soon after switching to dramatic writing. He first rose to prominence as a theatre critic but later achieved great popularity as a playwright.

In recent years he has been a vocal opponent of normalisation of relations with Israel, arguing his views on this other issues in his weekly column in the daily *Al-Ahram*.

Wahba received the French Légion d'Honneur in 1976, and in 1988 the Egyptian Merit Award. He is survived by his wife, actress Samiha Ayoub, and a daughter, Mona.

INSIDE

No boat to Doha

Public opinion at home stood firmly behind the decision, the US was disappointed and Qatar sour. Egypt would not seek economic benefits at the expense of justice for the Palestinians: there will be no Egyptian delegation at Doha

Following two weeks of intensive consultations and discussions, Cairo has said it will boycott next Sunday's regional economic cooperation conference in Doha. Following shuttle visits to a number of Gulf countries, President Hosni Mubarak announced on Tuesday that Egypt will not be sending an official delegation to the fourth Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA IV) hosted by Qatar on 16-18 November.

"Egypt will not take part in the Doha conference and will not send a delegation," he told a gathering of National Democratic Party (NDP) parliamentarians. "There is no objection for Egypt's ambassador to Qatar, [who was called back earlier in the week] to return and attend the opening ceremony if he is invited," said Mubarak.

Mubarak's announcement was met with applause and cheering by his NDP audience.

Leaders of opposition parties praised Mubarak's decision as reflecting national "pride and dignity." The US expressed disappointment and, in Israel, analysts said the boycott would chill further the already cool relations between Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, whose intransigence has stalemated peace-making, and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Qatar said the Egyptian decision would have no impact on the conference.

Egypt had linked its participation in MENA IV to tangible progress in the peace process. Affirming that "the appropriate decision will be taken at the appropriate time," Cairo waited in vain for a signal that Netanyahu would keep his side of the bargain and honour Israel's commitments towards the Palestinians.

"The peace process has reached a dead-end," noted Mubarak, adding that his decision came after "serious consideration of whether the conference would be beneficial to Egypt and the Arab world". By announcing a boycott, Egypt joined the ranks of Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Lebanon who are also staying away. Yemen, Jordan and Kuwait are the only Arab countries taking part. Oman, which had frozen economic initiatives with Israel after Netanyahu came to power, denied earlier reports confirming its participation.

Although the decision to stay away does not intrude on the participation of the business community in Egypt, only 11 entrepreneurs had registered for MENA IV before Tuesday's announcement. Of these, only four are Egyptian companies and the rest Egypt-based representatives of foreign mother enterprises.

Mubarak had earlier said that Arab public opinion is pressing for a boycott of the conference, stating that "even the Qatari people are not happy with the situation," a remark which drew fire from Doha and escalated the tensions which climaxed with Egypt recalling its ambassador, Mohamed Minessi, last Friday for consultations. Cairo was also angered by Qatar's decision to ban nationals from 10 countries, including Egypt, from entering the emirate because of intelligence information on possible attempts to sabotage the conference.

In an effort to contain the crisis, the ambassador is returning to Doha tomorrow.

By deciding to stay away from the conference, Egypt is effectively ignoring US advice on its merits. But Cairo believes that progress in peace-making comes first and that Arab-Israeli economic cooperation, enshrined in the MENA conferences, should reflect this progress. "They [the conferences] are a visible expression and live demonstration of progress [in the peace process]," Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's chief political adviser, told *Al-Ahram Weekly (Interivew p.3)*. "Why give the impression that things are moving when nothing is?"

According to El-Baz, it is blatantly clear that Israel's incumbent government is not interested in economic cooperation with its Arab neighbours. "To them, if the Arabs wish to cooperate in the economic field that's fine, if they don't that's also fine," El-Baz noted. In contrast to his predecessors, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, Netanyahu did not attend the annual gathering in Cairo last year, and will not be going to Doha. Foreign Minister David Levy is also known to be reluctant to take part.

Mubarak was in Saudi Arabia on Monday to consult with King Fahd. Shortly before their talks opened, the oil-rich kingdom announced that it would boycott the conference because of lack of progress in the peace process. The visit was the last in a series of trips to Gulf countries, which included Abu Dhabi, Oman and Bahrain. Mubarak said that he did not attempt to rally opposition to MENA IV during his talks there. "I did not discuss the Doha conference with the Arab leaders there," he said later. "I prefer to leave each country to decide according to its own interests."

During his talks with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat last Saturday it became clear that any hope for a breakthrough in peace-making before MENA IV had been dashed. Arafat told Mubarak that the Washington talks between the Palestinians and Israelis a week earlier were "very negative", and that no progress was made on any core issues such as a second redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank and a halt to settlement construction.

Mubarak's announcement was welcomed by opposition figures, intellectuals and the man-in-the-street. "The boycott proves that Egyptian decisions are taken at home and are not influenced by American pressure," said Yassin Serageddin, Wafd Party spokesman.

"It is a position reflecting dignity and pride; it is a wonderful decision," said Magdi Hussein, editor-in-chief of *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. "The Egyptian decision dealt the death blow to the Doha conference."

Maamoun El-Hodeibi, spokesman for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, argued that the MENA conferences aim at "promoting Israel's hegemony over the region. The boycott of the Doha conference reflects a dignified and rational position," he said.

Rifaat El-Said, secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party, described Mubarak's decision as a "positive step. We hope the same logic will prevail in future dealings with Israel as long as it continues to hinder peace-making," he said.

Playwright Ali Salem, a strong advocate of normalising relations with Israel, also praised the boycott as "the right decision." He said that after Netanyahu's rise to power, "all MENA conferences became meaningless."

Hala Mustafa, an expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said that "given the policies of Netanyahu, it is difficult to proceed with any plans of regional cooperation. This is the conclusion drawn by most Arab countries."

Samia Ali, a university student, reflected the average Egyptian's sentiment when she said metaphorically: "I would have certainly committed suicide if we decided to go to Doha."

In Washington, a US official expressed disappointment. Noting that Egypt is an important and strategic partner to the US, the official said the Clinton administration had hoped that Egypt would take part. Washington had also wished that the largest possible number of Arab states would have been represented in Doha at a high level, the official said.

He affirmed the US position that there should be no link between progress in peace-making and regional economic cooperation, insisting that the MENA conferences serve all states of the region, and not only Israel.

In Doha, the Qatari news agency quoted Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad ibn Jassem ibn Jaber Al-Thani as saying Egypt's decision "is up to them." "Their presence or absence at the conference means nothing to us," he said. (see pp.2 & 3)

Reported by **Nevine Khalil, Khaled Dawoud** *and* **Shaden Shehab**

In deciding that Egypt should not participate in the Doha conference President Mubarak has asserted once again Egypt's determination that the battle for peace in the Middle East will be an Arab battle, which cannot be subordinated to the narrow interests of individual Arab states.

Once again Mubarak has not shirked the difficult path. The decision not to attend demonstrates the president's responsiveness to popular Egyptian sentiment and his deep sense of empathy with the continuing deprivations *suffered by Palestinian* people.

Every state, Mubarak has said, must make decisions based on its own perceptions of interest and sovereignty. Egypt's own decision not to attend, though, is based on the belief that national interest must encompass not just the well-being of individual states, but of the whole Arab nation, a belief that strikes a resonant chord in the hearts of all Egyptians.

The aim behind holding such economic conferences is to foster cooperation between Israel and the Arab community, something that must, as Mubarak has repeatedly insisted, remain contingent upon real progress in the peace process. As long as Israel continues to hamper this process, as long as it throws any and every obstacle in the path of peace, then to talk of economic cooperation becomes an exercise in absurdity.

Mubarak has been unequivocal in his warnings: peace cannot be imposed by force. Nor can Israel continue its programme of land-grabbing and settlement building without incurring grave results. The land, sacred to all peoples, must be returned to its rightful owners.

Al-Ahram Weekly

No deals at MENA IV

ISRAELI government responses to Egypt's decision to boycott the Doha economic conference have remained non-committal. But most Israeli observers predict the decision will precipitate a further deterioration in relations between Binyamin Netanyahu and the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, reports **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem. On 10 November, *Ha'aretz* quoted Albright to the effect that any failure of the Qatar conference will be "because of Israel, whose obstinacy has prevented progress in the peace process". Albright is scheduled to meet Netanyahu on route to Qatar in London on Friday. It is expected to be a stormy meeting.

Egypt's decision has also lengthened the odds on Israel's Foreign Minister David Levy attending the conference. Levy was known to be reluctant to travel to Qatar "simply to be there", despite US pressure urging him to do so. A final decision on the level of Israel's participation is expected after a meeting between Levy and Netanyahu on Wednesday.

Whether or not Levy goes, Israel is expected to send around 30 government officials to Qatar, headed by Minister of Trade and Industry Natan Sharansky, as well as some 30 businessmen. But the mood among this latter delegation is already downbeat. "The chances of Israeli businessmen signing deals with Arab businessmen during the Qatar conference are very slim — almost nil," President of Israel's Chambers of Commerce Danny Gillerman told *Ha'aretz* on Monday. "In the current political climate, Arab businessmen will avoid any negotiation, agreement or deal with Israel."

Palestinian reactions are likely to be more positive. Palestinian businessmen last week announced their intention not to attend Doha in protest at Israel's policies of closure in the West Bank and Gaza, while the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) two weeks ago passed a motion "recommending" that the Palestinian Authority (PA) boycott the conference. A formal PA decision has yet to be taken but, says PA cabinet secretary, Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, "the Palestinian stand will not contradict the Arab stand."

Other Palestinians want the PA to go further than a mere boycott. "The peace process is dead and negotiations with Israel should be suspended," said former PLC member for Gaza, Haidar Abdel-Shafi. "Our main priority is to see to the daily needs of the people."

A suspension of negotiations is unlikely. But most Palestinian observers expect the "Palestinian stand" to be in line with Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Morocco rather than with Jordan, Kuwait and Yemen which have announced their attendance at the conference.

Iraq remains defiant

As the Security Council is poised to vote on additional sanctions against Baghdad, the Iraqi government refuses to back down in its two-week-old showdown with the UN

Iraq again barred a UN team of weapons inspectors, that included Americans, as hundreds of Iraqi youths carrying anti-American banners demonstrated in Baghdad yesterday to show support for President Saddam Hussein.

It was the ninth time in 10 days that Baghdad turned back disarmament experts, despite the threat of harsher sanctions. Five teams left the UN headquarters in Baghdad yesterday morning but Iraqi officials refused to let one team carry out the inspections because it included Americans. The inspectors refused to leave the Americans behind and the team returned to the headquarters, the Iraqi News Agency said. The four other teams then followed suit.

Baghdad charges that Washington is using the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) as a tool to keep UN sanctions in place indefinitely and insists that the *make-up of the Commission should* be changed.

Iraq's official newspapers stressed yesterday that Iraq would not back down despite the threat of US military action. "The barking of the United States does not scare the Iraqis," said the newspaper, *Babel*, which is run by Saddam's son, Uday.

At the UN, the Security Council was expected to vote on a joint US-British resolution calling for the immediate resumption of UNSCOM inspections of arms sites. The resolution would ban Iraqi officials who interfere with the inspectors from travelling abroad, condemn Iraq for threatening to expel American inspectors and suspend further reviews of economic sanctions against Iraq until the inspectors certify that Baghdad is cooperating.

US ambassador Bill Richardson said he expected "near unanimity" on the resolution. "This resolution is going to be passed, and we think it sends an unmistakable signal for Iraq to comply immediately," he said.

Diplomats said France and Russia, which oppose military action, sided with the US and Britain after the text was stripped of references which could have opened the way for a unilateral US military strike against Iraq.

The resolution warns, however, of "further measures as may be required" to force Iraq into complying.

Diplomatic sources said the French, Russians and others planned one last try at persuading the Iraqis to back down in the hours before the vote.

Iraq's deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, has been meeting with UN ambassadors since he arrived at the UN on Monday.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Said Al-Sahhaf who, together with other top officials, was called to confer with Saddam on Tuesday, shrugged off the threat of additional sanctions. "That would be a stupid resolution. If they think that we fear a travel ban, they will be disappointed because there is nothing worse than the embargo imposed on us," he said.

Sahhaf also renewed threats to shoot down a US spy plane used by the UN for reconnaissance missions and to expel the six Americans posted in Baghdad for UNSCOM.

The Security Council imposed sweeping economic sanctions in August 1990 after Iraq invaded neighbouring Kuwait. The Council has said the sanctions will not be lifted until the inspectors determine that Baghdad has complied with UN orders issued at the end of the Gulf War, requiring that Saddam destroy all long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction. (see p.6)

Cairo acts to defuse crisis

FOLLOWING a meeting between President Hosni Mubarak and his top aides yesterday, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said Egypt has launched intensive consultations with the Iraqi government and the UN with the aim of defusing the showdown between Baghdad and the world organisation.

"We have had numerous contacts with the Iraqi side in an attempt to contain the current crisis through diplomatic efforts," Moussa told reporters. "I spoke today with Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Said Al-Sahhaf, after I was asked by President Mubarak to remain in close touch with him as well as the UN Secretary-General."

According to Moussa, Egypt stepped up its diplomatic efforts to make sure that "Iraq is given a fair chance to explain its position" and, hopefully, is persuaded to reconsider.

Under discussion at present, Moussa said, is an "appropriate formula" to contain the crisis. This formula would cover Iraq's compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and also an effort to take into consideration the complaints and concerns put forward by Baghdad.

A diplomatic source said that it is becoming "increasingly difficult" to ignore the complaints of Iraq, which has suffered under UN-imposed sanctions for more than six years. At present, Egypt is involved in talks with a number of Arab states to agree on some sort of arrangement for easing the sufferings of the Iraqi people, the source said. Preparations are underway for a high-level conference to deal with the problem, the source added.

The meeting which Mubarak chaired included Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, deputy Prime Minister Youssef Wali, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, presidential adviser Osama El-Baz and chief of the presidential staff Zakaria Azmi.

On Tuesday evening, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan telephoned Cairo for an exchange of views on the situation.

Reported by **Dina Ezzat** *and* **Nevine Khalil**

The announcement finally came on Tuesday: Egypt will not be going to Doha. **Dina Ezzat** reviews the last days of lobbying, hinting and speculating leading up to the announcement; reports on Cairo's determination to contain an incipient crisis with Qatar; and gives a Doha-eve status report on the peace process: still stalled and facing total collapse. **Amira Howeidy**, meanwhile, reports on pre-announcement opposition mobilisation for a boycott of the Doha conference

The final verdict



Mubarak, at the opening session of parliament, announces 'no' to Doha

For some time now it has been a racing certainty that Egypt would not send a delegation to the fourth Middle East/North Africa economic conference scheduled to open on Sunday in Doha, capital of Qatar. It has equally been expected that Cairo would seek to present this decision in a way that would not be offensive to the Americans or further strain relations with the host country.

Yet for the past few weeks, speculation has been rife about what the final Egyptian decision — studiously kept secret until the last minute — would be. The general impression was that Egypt was not going to participate. "And we are not participating," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa declared on Tuesday, thus setting everyone's mind at rest. "We will just be present at one particular ceremonial event in accordance with the standard protocol, under which all foreign ambassadors are invited to take part in that event," he explained.

On the eve of the announcement, an official source disclosed that the decision-makers were in favour of a boycott, or what diplomats prefer to call "absence".

The reasons were many and various. Egypt wanted Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to understand that he cannot continue building settlements on occupied Arab lands and still have Arab economic cooperation handed to him on a silver platter. "We do not see any progress in the peace process that could make us change our mind or believe that this economic conference could serve the original purpose of peace," Moussa told reporters shortly before the decision was made public.

Egypt also wanted to send a message of protest to Qatar, which had insulted the Egyptian ambassador in the pages of its newspapers, denied entry visas to Egyptian citizens and deported about 50 per cent of the Egyptian labour force working there.

Moreover, Egypt had good reasons to coordinate its position with key Arab allies who are boycotting the conference, such as Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

Domestic public opinion, which seems largely opposed to the idea of participation, is also a serious concern, particularly at a time when Iraq, smarting under the yoke of UN sanctions, is locked in confrontation with the United States.

At a Cairo rally last week, representatives of political parties and other forces pleaded with the government to boycott the conference "that aims to emphasise Israeli and American political and economic hegemony over the region." At the same time, national and opposition newspapers alike were uniquely joined in harmonious anti-Doha symphony.

The Egyptian decision obviously went against the wishes of the United States which has been constantly "encouraging" Cairo to attend. Sources say that the issue was raised *by every single American official to* visit Cairo recently, from US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on down. All these visitors carried the same message: Washington does not like to see its allies linking economic cooperation with Israel to lack of progress in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations — particularly when it comes to MENA.

"It is true that when Albright was in Cairo, she received a promise that Egypt would participate if any progress, even limited progress, was made on the Palestinian-Israeli track," one official said. "But nothing happened, nothing that one could even try and project as progress."

Sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the US Embassy in Cairo was heavily involved in lobbying Egyptian businessmen to encourage their government to participate, even at a low level. The lobbying particularly targeted the Egyptian members of the Egyptian-US Business Council.

No luck. There were only two businessmen — one from the tourism sector and another from the ceramics industry — who were prepared to attend.

"So far, the total number of reg*istered participants from the Egyp*tian private sector is eight, but only two of them are Egyptian. The six others are foreign businessmen who represent foreign companies working *in Egypt. Therefore, they are reg*istered as representatives of the Egyptian private sector," an official explained.

None of the leading names among *Egyptian entrepreneurs have decided* to make the journey to Doha.

Sources say that the Americans and Israelis are in close touch with some figures who are involved in business with them, but despite this "influence" it still seems that this is a decision big businessmen are reluctant to take.

Moussa, asked if Egypt would allow its businessmen to participate in the conference, responded: "It is not a matter of allowing or not. We [as a government] do not involve ourselves in the decisions of businessmen. This is entirely up to them. They make their own decisions in accordance with their interests."

Egypt was also concerned as to how its decision would be perceived by the Qataris. Cairo did not wish to worsen already tense relations with Qatar.

In the final analysis, argued one leading diplomat, Egypt did the right thing. Cairo successfully "struck a balance" between its duties and its legitimate concerns.



Saudi Arabia is also staying away from Doha. Mubarak consulting with King Fahd in the Saudi capital, Riyad, on Monday

Pouring oil over troubled waters

The sharp decline in Egyptian-Qatari relations seems to have been reversed. The exchange of acrimonies between the two Arab states, last week, escalated in a manner that was threatening to get out of hand. However, dedicated efforts are now being made to ensure that the problem is defused and that common interests prevail.

"Egypt is always working to overcome any differences that may arise with another Arab state, particularly since those problems are neither fundamental nor strategic," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, in response to a question about the dispute.

He added that "no inter-Arab problem should be allowed to escalate into an exchange of attacks, because there is no need for that at all. Differences should be dealt with in a brotherly manner."

After months of feuding over the number of Egyptian workers in Qatar, as well as over Qatar's hosting of the fourth Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA IV), disagreements came to a head last week when a leading pro-government Qatari newspaper printed an article attacking Egyptian ambassador Mohamed Menissi. Cairo reacted by recalling the ambassador for consultations.

Menissi is scheduled to return to Qatar tomorrow.

"I hope that both Egypt and Qatar will work to resolve all these misunderstandings as soon as possible, because a rift in bilateral relations will not be good for either country," Menissi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "That is why I am here in Cairo to discuss ways of improving Egyptian-Qatari relations."

The ambassador met with Foreign Minister Moussa to review various aspects of relations between the two countries. Ways of getting over — or even around — their outstanding problems are currently being formulated, sources said.

"I will be back in Qatar by the beginning of next week and will start work immediately on defusing this problem that has been blown up out of all proportion," Menissi said.

It was early last week that the Qatari newspaper *Al-Watan* published an article under the title: "False preachers of pan-Arabism, allow us to speak and express our disappointment." Without mentioning Egypt by name, the author took Cairo to task for allegedly launching a press campaign against Qatar for its insistence on hosting MENA IV despite the stalemate in the peace process. Again without mentioning the Egyptian ambassador by name, the article lashed out at him for objecting to the "counter-criticism" of Egypt that had been published by the Qatari press. In an obvious allusion to Cairo, the article said "the country of the ambassador who is making these objections hosted MENA III last year after exerting enormous and strenuous diplomatic efforts to convene the conference."

Menissi denied having taken any official action to protest against such anti-Egyptian criticism in the Qatari press. He said he only raised the matter with some Qatari officials to make sure that things do not get out of hand.

*President Hosni Mubarak, speaking to Egyp*tian television, expressed disappointment about the anti-Egyptian sentiment expressed in the Qatari press.

Shortly after Menissi's recall to Cairo, a spokesman for the Qatari Foreign Ministry praised Egyptian-Qatari relations and asserted that the problems between the two countries should be contained within the existing framework of mutual respect. The spokesman also said that the embargo imposed by Qatar on issuing entry visas to Egyptians, among other Arab nationals, was only a temporary measure. Most countries, he said, would choose to curtail the number of entry visas issued while hosting an international conference.

Egyptian officials also tried to pour oil on troubled waters. Menissi said that his mission in Cairo did not indicate any Egyptian intention "to reduce or freeze its relations with Qatar."

But more work still needs to be done if the problem is to be defused completely.

Egypt's participation in MENA IV is a prime issue. Although Cairo decided against sending an official delegation to the conference, it gave its ambassador in Doha the green light to attend the inaugural ceremony, to which all foreign ambassadors in the Qatari capital will be invited.

The Qataris expect Cairo to tone down its criticism of the conference, a request which Egypt seems ready to meet. "We do not talk about a boycott of an event that is taking place *in an Arab state. We just say that we do not* think that there is a way to make this conference serve the peace process, to which we believe regional economic cooperation is related," said presidential adviser Osama El-Baz.

Meanwhile, Egyptian and Qatari newspapers appear to have called a cease-fire in the war of words which had been raging only a few days earlier.

The issue of the number of Egyptian workers in Qatar, which has declined significantly over the period since last November, still needs to be settled. According to a diplomatic source, "some countries have been trying to antagonise the Qatari government against Egyptian workers, suggesting that they could cause security problems, in order to drive a wedge between Egypt and Qatar. But we are going to deal with this matter tactfully."

Cairo is also ready to offer Qatar assurances that it is not opposed to the incumbent government and that it is not involved in any attempt to restore power to the former Emir, who was overthrown by his son, the current ruler.

The source suggested that a high level meeting "could remedy the situation" and that efforts will be exerted as soon as the time is right.

'More meetings, more hard times'

Cairo played host this week to visitors from Canada, the European Union and Palestine who talked with Egyptian officials about ways of salvaging the Middle East peace process, which has been deadlocked for months. But there were no concrete results, and no new sense of optimism.

The emphasis was on two matters: completing the "code of conduct" that the European Union is attempting to put together to serve as an umbrella for future Arab-Israeli negotiations and persuading the government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to show some flexibility.

"We are doing everything possible to save the peace process, but what we are talking about here is a government [Netanyahu's] that cannot be bothered to honour the agreements it signed or show any respect for international law. I am not expecting any positive results," said a senior Egyptian diplomat.

The same pessimistic vision was shared by the Palestinian delegation who held talks on Tuesday with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa to brief Cairo on the details of negotiations held in Washington earlier this month between the Palestinians and Israelis under the aegis of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. "The Israelis are adopting a very negative attitude and I don't see that changing," said senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Ereikat.

Other visitors to Cairo were Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, Jacques Poos, Foreign Minister of Luxembourg — which currently hold the EU presidency — and European envoy Miguel Moratinos. They all expressed similar apprehensions about the future.

"We are going to Israel to try to [take] some steps forward, not big steps, small steps I think, to [get] the peace process on the right track again," said Poos speaking in English.

The steps that Poos has in mind are not really that small. The EU is trying to sell the Palestinians and Israelis a deal under which both sides will refrain from any unilateral action — a euphemism for the building of Jewish settlements in occupied Arab lands. Although the deal obviously targets Israel, it is a diplomatic necessity that it should be addressed to both sides. The deal also includes the establishment of a permanent security committee, made up of the negotiating parties as well as Egypt, the EU and the two co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States and Russia.

Some diplomats believe that the chances of getting Netanyahu's government to accept such a deal are very remote. The reason is that the deal is based on the land-for-peace formula to which Netanyahu is adamantly opposed.

Although the Europeans and Canadians are well aware that without returning land to the Palestinians, there will be no peace, they do not seem ready to put any serious pressure on Israel to respect international law, the terms of the peace process established in the Madrid conference or the provisions of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians.

Poos, asked if the Europeans were ready to take punitive economic action against Israel, replied negatively and said that this was not the appropriate time.

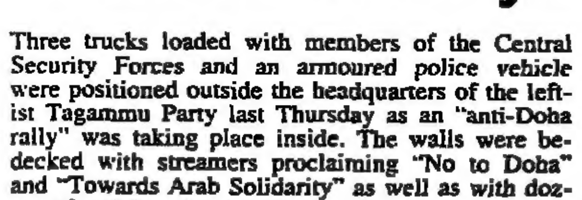
For his part, Axworthy's account of "Canadian efforts to support the peace process" included allusions to mediation efforts and to providing financial help to Palestinian refugees. However, he made no mention of any link between Canada's growing economic cooperation with Israel and that country's commitment to peace-making. What is more, while in the region, Axworthy will head a delegation of *Canadian businessmen to the fourth Mid*dle East/North Africa economic conference in Doha.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu has been making statements affirming his position that Is*rael will keep the larger part of the West* Bank under its control in any final settlement with the Palestinians.

Presidential adviser Osama El-Baz shrugged off these statements. "The future of the peace process and the region is not going to be decided on the basis of a statement made by the Israeli prime minister," El-Baz said.

Still, *Egyptian and Palestinian diplomats* concede that Netanyahu's statements are driving almost everyone else to be increasingly pessimistic over prospects for a breakthrough.

*Asked about his expectations for the fu*ture, one official replied (in effect): more meetings, more Israeli intransigence and, above all, more hard times for the Palestinian people.



Opposition calls for Doha boycott



Mohieddin



Dawoud

Three trucks loaded with members of the Central Security Forces and an armoured *police vehicle* were positioned outside the headquarters of the leftist Tagammu Party last Thursday as an "anti-Doha rally" was taking place inside. The walls were bedecked with streamers proclaiming "No to Doha" and "Towards Arab Solidarity" as well as with dozens of anti-Israel cartoons.

"This rally is a message to the Palestinian people," a Tagammu Party official shouted through the PA system. "We will not allow the Arabs to stab you in the back by attending the Doha conference."

Taking part in the rally were leaders and/or representatives of the Tagammu, Nasserist, Labour and Liberal parties, as well as the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and the Communists.

"I am fed up with talking and issuing statements and my listeners must be bored as well," said Nasserist Party leader Diaeddin Dawoud. To the cheers of the crowd, he added: "The only language Israel understands is the language of force. Let us use it."

Other speakers included Tagammu's leader Khaled Mohieddin, the Brotherhood's Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna and communist Nabil El-Hilali. They lashed out in *turn at the Doha conference*, the normalisation of relations with Israel, the policies of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and the US attitude towards the current stalemate.

The rally called for a boycott of the Doha conference, the recommendations of previous conferences in Casablanca, Amman and Cairo to be declared illegal, the Arab League's Israel-boycott bureau to be reactivated and the establishment of a common Arab market. Although it urged commitment to the resolutions of the June 1996 Cairo Arab summit, which sanctioned peace *as the Arabs' strategic* option, the meeting urged Arab governments which have signed peace treaties with Israel to reconsider the provisions of those treaties.

Speakers said the rally "reflected the reaction of the mass of the people, who reject any form of normalisation with Israel."

The anti-normalisation campaign took a significant step forward last week when a group of parliamentarians joined in calling for a boycott not only of Israeli goods but also *goods of American origin. The group quickly* developed into a large committee consisting of 41 MPs and dozens of intellectuals, university professors and journalists. Ahmed Taha, a leftist MP, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* the group is now preparing a *"programme of action to turn our call into reality."*

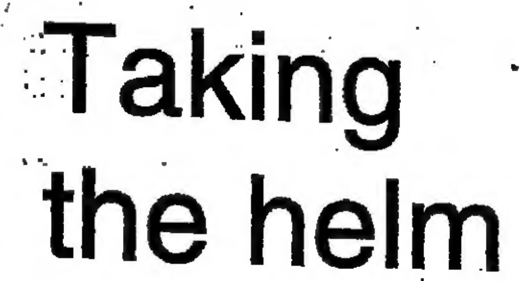
"We were surprised by the wide-scale response, reflecting the nationalist sentiments of a broad cross-section of society who support our call," Taha said. "We received faxes from Egyptians and Arabs *all over the world saying they* want to take part."

Taha said the committee was collecting data on the size of American and Israeli investments in Egypt.

According to a US Embassy source, US investments *in Egypt amount to $1.5 billion.*

Both the US and Israeli embassies declined to comment.





Taking the helm

Having volunteered to host the G-15 summits in 1998 and 2000, Egypt will have its hands full if it wants to revitalise the group dedicated to South-South cooperation

At all three G-15 summits which President Hosni Mubarak has attended, he has criticised the lack of progress toward South-South cooperation. He has also consistently underlined the necessity of North-South dialogue and the urgency for the developing world to take part in determining the form of the new world economic order. **Nevine Khalil** looks at Cairo's chances of pepping up the group's performance.

Now, Egypt has a chance to address these problems head-on as Mubarak takes over the chairmanship of the group. The G-15 now brings together 16 developing countries with promising economies, though it has stuck to its old name. The countries involved are Egypt, Algeria, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, Jamaica and Mexico.

Egypt may well be able to succeed in its mission, since it is one of the founding members of the G-15 and its parent organisation the Non-Aligned Movement. As chairman, Mubarak will be able both to bring his powers of persuasion to bear on the political leaders of other states and to prepare a solid agenda for the 1998 summit to be held next May. It is clear that Mubarak has decided to throw his weight behind the group's activities, and has committed Egypt to "continuous efforts to strengthen the role of the group, because member states share a common fate."

Mubarak cited the nine memoranda of understanding which were signed between Egypt and Malaysia on the fringe of last week's Kuala Lumpur summit, which he said should serve as an example for forging intra-group economic ties. Deficient South-South cooperation is one corollary of the overwhelming tendency of the developing world to depend on the industrialised nations, and set aside insufficient funding for joint projects.

One item which featured prominently on Egypt's agenda last week was the need to close the gap between the developing world and the developed world in the field of high-tech. Participants in next year's gathering are expected to further press the issue of the transfer of technology from the first world to the third.

Progress is also likely on the issue of North-South dialogue during Egypt's chairmanship. Mubarak is on good personal terms with most of the industrialised G-7 heads of state which may enable him to convince Northern leaders to agree to dialogue with the South. Attempts to organise North-South dialogue have failed in the past because the developed countries were not interested.

During discussions in Kuala Lumpur, Mubarak went over the terms of reference for such a dialogue, including preconditions, ways of making it succeed and role designation.

Analysts believe that the G-15 states have only themselves to blame for their present lack of influence. They argue that if the group were to raise its profile through increased intra-group cooperation and a united stance at world forums, then they would be taken seriously. Only last week, while preparing a separate statement on currency volatility, some participants tried to water down the wording of the document in order to avoid making any substantial criticism of the economic policies of the industrialised nations.

Although modeling themselves on the G-7, with no binding decisions, open discussions and no written rules, G-15 members are not as disciplined as their industrialised counterparts. The G-15 organisation may still seem attractive to a number of outsiders, such as Jordan, Kuwait and Vietnam, but some member states, especially Latin Americans, have shown signs of beginning to look elsewhere. "There are a lot of countries that are losing interest in the G-15 because representation is not always guaranteed at the top executive level," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said.

Only six heads of state and government came to Malaysia, and the rest of the member states were represented by vice-presidents, ministers or even in one case an ambassador. Mubarak insists that representation must be "at a high level because this reflects the seriousness of the group", drawing parallels with the G-7, the European Union and the Organisation of African Unity.

It is hoped that Egypt's policy of introducing economic reforms gradually may serve as a level-headed model of growth for other developing countries, especially after the recent capital market crisis which seriously jolted the much-lauded economies of Malaysia and Indonesia. The role of the private sector in consolidating intra-group cooperation and economic development will be further boosted by a meeting of businessmen from the member states due to be held in Cairo.

By next May, it is expected that the skeleton structure of a permanent G-15 secretariat will be in place, in order to ensure proper follow-up and preparation for the group's summits as well as coordination with other world forums. The Cairo summit is also expected to review the outcome of the December meeting of the governors of central banks and heads of financial market authorities of the G-15 members, which is to study the monetary problems of developing economies and ways of dealing with the rapid flow of capital.

Why give the wrong impression

As the countdown began to the fourth MENA conference that is due to open in Doha, Qatar, on Sunday, the peace process continued to sink ever deeper into the immobility of despair. Osama El-Baz, chief political adviser to President Mubarak, sees no reason to project the impression that things are moving, when they are not. He spoke to Nevine Khalil about his fears for the continuing deadlock



How did the Doha summit feature in the talks with top US officials who recently came to the Middle East, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Undersecretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk?

In all honesty, [Albright's] top priority was the peace process and it was within this framework that she addressed the Doha summit. If it had been a question just of Doha, she would not have spent all her time with the Palestinians and Israelis. Likewise, the Doha conference was only one of the issues on Indyk's agenda.

What did the American officials say regarding the economic cooperation conference?

The US position, which has some merit, is that attending the Doha conference is not a concession to Israel. It is in the interests of the Arabs themselves to attend, participate and reap the benefits of these conferences. Another valid US argument is that to influence the Israeli people, the Arabs should hold out to them the promise of regional economic cooperation.

Through this you would be helping the peace forces in Israel, but if you boycott Israel and treat it as an enemy, you will not be able to influence any groups [in Israel].

How convincing is this argument?

It is true that [the regional economic conference] will be of benefit to the Arabs but, on the other hand, one cannot be blind to the fact that these conferences have acquired a certain degree of symbolism. They are held under the umbrella of the Madrid conference as part of the multilateral talks, and [therefore] are a visible expression and living demonstration of progress [in the peace process].

Therefore, if no progress is being achieved on any of the bilateral tracks, it would be an irony to [over-publicise] one aspect of the multilateral track. Why give the impression that things are moving when nothing is moving?

How concerned is Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu about making the Doha conference a success?

The incumbent Israeli government does not care much about regional economic cooperation. They are not enthused by the idea and consider it [former Israeli Prime Minister] Shimon Peres' baby. They have made it look like this is a personal crusade or commitment by Peres.

For them, if the Arabs wish to cooperate in the economic field, that's fine, if they don't, that's also fine. To them the Doha issue is not important. The whole issue of economic cooperation is a very minor issue. A good indication of this is that Prime Minister Netanyahu is not going. This is the second time that Netanyahu will be absent [after last year's Cairo conference], whereas his predecessors attended them all.

The [incumbent government] is interested in establishing peace on its own terms, but when it comes to economic cooperation it is not high on the agenda, if it is there at all. On the other hand, the previous government placed a very big premium on economic cooperation.

What was expected to come out of the Washington talks between the Palestinians and Israelis last week?

When Mrs Albright came to the region [in September], she came with a concrete agenda that was discussed thoroughly with the different parties. Hence, the Palestinians [justifiably] expected the agenda [in Washington] to focus on the issues which were on [Albright's] agenda.

Added to that is the fact that the Palestinians have already fulfilled what was [required] of them in the area of security coordination and cooperation, [which] was the focal point of Albright's mission to the region. The Palestinians delivered their part of the bargain, which means it remains for the other party to deliver.

So why did the talks fail?

You cannot talk about [opening a Palestinian] airport or harbour while you are neglecting vital issues such as further redeployment, a pause in settlement activities, the avoidance of any unilateral actions that are inconsistent with the provisions of the interim agreement.

These include the confiscation of Palestinian land, demolition of [Palestinian] houses, imposition of collective punishment, closure of territories and seizure of IDs [belonging to the] Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem.

These are the essential points, the other points, although not unimportant, are minor in relative terms.

Therefore, Israel's agenda at the talks was unsatisfactory?

It is quite obvious that the Palestinian focus was mainly on further redeployment because they believe that this is a crucial commitment on the part of Israel, and it is indicative of Israeli intentions. If Israel does not carry out its obligation to redeploy, then the chances will be very slim for achieving any real progress in final status negotiations.

If they are unwilling to implement what they already agreed to and accepted in the interim arrangement, then there is more reason to think that in the final status negotiations Israel will not move.

The Palestinians are justified to insist on focusing on the essential rather than the tangential issues, and that progress is made on these issues, as well as others which are less important but are nonetheless there.

Does this mean that progress on non-core issues at this point is insignificant?

Nobody is saying that the other issues are unimportant. For instance, the issue of a safe-passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is important, no one [should] minimise its importance, but it is not as important as further redeployment and halting settlement activities. It comes third to these.

The Palestinians [were] worried that the [Washington talks] might end up achieving progress on one tangential problem, namely the airport, and that this can be used [by Israel to say] that they made concessions and that progress has been achieved.

How realistic is it to hope for serious progress at this point?

What makes progress easy and possible to achieve on the issues of further redeployment, a pause on settlement activities and unilateral actions is that these are not elements to be negotiated. They have already been agreed upon and what is needed now is implementation. It is easier to implement certain obligations, which is different from negotiating new issues.

We welcome any progress, but we do not think that achieving progress on something like the airport constitutes [real] progress, because it is a tangential issue.

Is Israel now convinced that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has done all he can to contain alleged terrorist activities in areas under his control?

Previously, Israelis said they were not going to withdraw from Palestinian territories because this would result in handing over the territories to terrorist organisations, which would endanger the safety and security of Israelis.

They are not saying that in serious terms these days, because everybody, including the Americans who were party and [who have] witnessed that Arafat has taken strict and fair measures in order to ensure security, knows that the Palestinians have done their best to prevent the occurrence of any [terrorist acts].

Now, when the Israelis say the Palestinians have not done enough, they say it tongue-in-cheek. They cannot say it in a loud voice because the Palestinians have done more than Israel did [to fight terrorism]. It was Israel that released the Hamas leaders. The Palestinians cannot be asked to be more firm than Israel itself.

What is Israel's pretext now for not carrying out its obligations?

They say the Palestinians have not done enough, but they do not say how or why. They have not presented the Palestinians with specific demands on security in order to hold talks. They can hardly support or justify their conclusion that the Palestinians have not done enough.

Isn't the US getting a little fed up with Israel's policies regarding the peace process?

We assume that the US wants stability in the region, and for the peace process to flourish. Big countries don't lose patience, especially when it comes to matters that are not related directly to their interest.

[The peace process] is related to an area in which they are interested, and they believe that the current state of affairs is not an ideal situation and carries many dangers with it. They believe they should persevere and continue to play an active role in the interest of peace in the region and their own interest as well.

Is there a need for Russia to play a role in the peace process in order to balance the US's role?

It is not a question of balance. The US position is a positive one and we do not need a balancing factor. What we need is a helping hand [for] the Americans, whether it comes from Russia or the European Union.

Russia is obviously anxious to play a role and Russian President [Boris] Yeltsin promised President [Hosni] Mubarak to play a more active role. They made good their promise when they sent Foreign Minister [Yevgeny] Primakov who is an experienced diplomat, and an expert on the Middle East. We believe that they are sincere and serious in playing this role.

If Israel gets the message that the most important world powers and the majority of the Jewish community outside Israel are for greater flexibility, and for implementing whatever agreements and commitments [have been] made to the Palestinians, I believe that this will weigh heavily on the Israeli government. The Israeli government cannot fight a war against all these forces. It's not Don Quixote.

But is Russia capable of playing an effective role in the peace process, especially given that Israel has for a long time fought shy of any peace broker other than the US?

You cannot reject an active Russian role, because it is part and parcel of the peace process. They are the official co-sponsors of the process and [there is] a substantial Russian community inside Israel.

[Israel] can always resort to the accusation that Russia or Russian individuals are helping Iran with its missile capabilities and so forth. This has not been proven, and they cannot disqualify Russia. [Moscow] is not taking an anti-Israel position, but is trying to be fair — dealing with both sides equally.

How do you perceive Foreign Minister David Levy's initial refusal to go to Washington without a clear mandate to negotiate from Netanyahu?

We don't know exactly what happened, because Levy, like any other official there, is a politician. He makes deals. He got a limited mandate, maybe only to discuss essential issues but not to commit Israel to implement. But we cannot say this with absolute certainty.

What happened between Levy and Netanyahu was part of domestic politics, and I don't think it is indicative of a serious difference of opinion.

Copts reject US meddling


Pope Shenouda


Labib Rizk


Sonbol


Abdel-Sayed


Bishara

FIFTY-three prominent Christians and Muslims, including scholars and writers, issued a joint "Statement to the Nation" on Sunday rejecting any American attempt to meddle in Coptic affairs — the same position taken by the Coptic Orthodox Church, reports **Fatemah Farag**.

The statement was published by all the national and opposition newspapers, but it was displayed most conspicuously by *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, which gave it a full-page spread, with a crescent embracing a cross in the centre.

The statement begins by recalling the historical nationalist role played by Egyptian Copts in the face of foreign occupation, from the mediaeval Crusaders to the modern British. It goes on to proclaim that "we, therefore, refuse all forms of US intervention in Egypt's affairs under the pretext of defending Copts... and hints that aid to Egypt might be cut off. Foreign intervention on the pretext of protecting Copts has been rejected by the people and similar schemes throughout history have all come to naught."

Last Saturday during a meeting at the Rotary Club in Alexandria, Pope Shenouda III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, had denounced "rumours" circulating abroad about the alleged oppression of Christians in Egypt. He affirmed that "those who wish to create sectarian differences between Muslims and Christians will fail."

In August, the Coptic community was upset by a report compiled by Senator Joe Lieberman of the Subcommittee on Middle East Affairs, claiming that Christians were the target of persecution in Egypt, Sudan and Saudi Arabia, and that Bahais are persecuted in Iran. Lieberman put forward a draft law which would impose a boycott on companies which deal with countries where harassment, intimidation and anti-Christian policies have become "daily occurrences."

Pope Shenouda III told *Al-Ahram Weekly* at the time, "We don't need anybody to claim that they are defending the rights of Copts. The US administration is better off devoting attention to the abuse of human rights in the Israeli-Occupied Territories."

The latest statement conceded that Copts were subjected to some degree of "harassment", but added that any such problems must be solved within an "Egyptian context".

The signatories of the statement included Edouard El-Dahabi and Angele Boutros Samaan, appointed members of the People's Assembly, movie directors Khairi Bishara and Dawoud Abdel-Sayed, journalists Said Sonbol and Louis Greiss, novelist Magid Tobia, historian Yunan Labib Rizk, actress Sana'a Gamil and actor George Sidhoum.

Laws, questions and re-elections

In the new session which opened yesterday, the People's Assembly will debate a new batch of investor-friendly legislation, as well as such controversial issues as privatisation sales and relations with Israel. **Gamal Essam El-Din** outlines the forthcoming business

At the opening of the third session of the current five-year term of the People's Assembly yesterday, Ahmed Fathi Sorour was re-elected as speaker and El-Sayed Rashed as deputy Speaker. Amal Osman, former minister of social affairs, was also elected to serve as joint deputy Speaker, filling a post that fell vacant with the death of Ahmed Hamadi last February. Osman became the first woman to be elected to a leading parliamentary post in the history of modern Egypt.

Sorour and his two deputies were nominated at a special meeting on Tuesday by the parliamentary majority of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). The meeting was chaired by President Hosni Mubarak, who will make a speech on Saturday to a plenary meeting of both the Assembly and the Shura Council.

Sorour managed to win the speaker's post for the eighth consecutive year despite a hostile press campaign that accused him of undermining the Assembly's supervision of the government's performance and stripping deputies of their legislative powers. Sorour was also accused of squandering public funds on too many foreign trips.

Yassin Serageddin, chairman of the parliamentary group of the opposition Wafd Party, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Wafd voted for Sorour, but he said the chairmen of some parliamentary committees should be replaced because "they did not have the required level of efficiency."

The Assembly will soon get down to business, grappling with a new batch of investor-friendly laws as well as a host of controversial issues. Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri announced on 16 October that the government will submit to the Assembly a set of 15 draft laws that aim at speeding up investment procedures and opening public sector monopolies to private competition. During the past two years, the Assembly has passed 23 such investor-friendly laws.

Ahmed Abu Zeid, leader of the NDP majority, told the *Weekly* that El-Ganzouri's new set of laws reflected the government's "economic development philosophy." "It is a sequel to former Prime Minister Atef Sidki's anti-inflationary policies, which focused on implementing sweeping economic reforms in terms of cutting the rate of inflation, reducing the budget deficit, improving the balance of payments and accumulating a large foreign exchange reserve in the Central Bank," said Abu Zeid. Following the success of Sidki's policies, Ganzouri has to focus on promoting growth and productivity rates to at least seven per cent annually, Abu Zeid added.

"This primarily comes through passing laws aimed at creating a better environment for direct investment and encouraging a spirit of private entrepreneurship through privatisation and the reduction of public sector monopolies in such areas as marine and air transport, public utilities and finally telecommunications," Abu Zeid said.

The government's new set of 15 investor-friendly laws will facilitate the procedure for establishing investment companies, reduce tariffs to as low as 30 per cent and give entrepreneurs more opportunity to submit bids to government projects and government-provided public services.

One economic law of particular significance aims at establishing a free trade zone in the Gulf of Suez. "This law is part of the government's efforts to forge closer economic relations with the Asian Tigers, especially Malaysia, Japan and Singapore," said Abdel-Wahab Qota, chairman of the Port Said Businessmen's Association.

Serageddin charged that Ganzouri, despite his investor-friendly policies, is still hesitant with respect to two key laws, the first liberalising the rental values of residential apartments in older buildings and the second regulating relations between workers and employers in a free market economy. "I think Ganzouri should go ahead with these two laws, particularly since the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled in February that the government's privatisation policy is constitutional," Serageddin said.

Serageddin is planning to submit two draft laws to the Assembly, which he described as part of the Wafd Party's agenda for political reform, although most opposition bills have been shelved in the past. The first, he said, aims at regulating the trial of cabinet ministers suspected of wrong-doing, and the second prohibits parliamentary deputies from holding government posts.

Several questions and requests for information already directed by deputies to cabinet ministers address the issue of Egyptian-Israeli relations. Serageddin said that, for the second time, he has submitted a question to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa about the Egyptian war prisoners who were killed by Israeli troops during the 1956 and 1967 wars.

Another question to Moussa came from Sameh Ashour, the sole Nasserist deputy in the House, who inquired about the reasons for turning over to Tel Aviv a number of Israelis who were suspected of spying.

El-Badri Farghali, a deputy for the leftist Tagammu Party from Port Said city, submitted an interpellation — a question that must obligatorily be answered — to Ganzouri about the alleged deterioration of commercial and service conditions in his home town.

For its part, the Shura Council is planning to hold its own debates on a number of vital reports covering a variety of subjects. These include the necessity of keeping the Middle East free from mass destruction weapons, the facilitation of judicial procedures in a free market era, conditions governing the publication of periodicals and the protection of antiquities. The reports also deal with construction regulations, conservation of agricultural and water resources and Egyptian-European partnership.

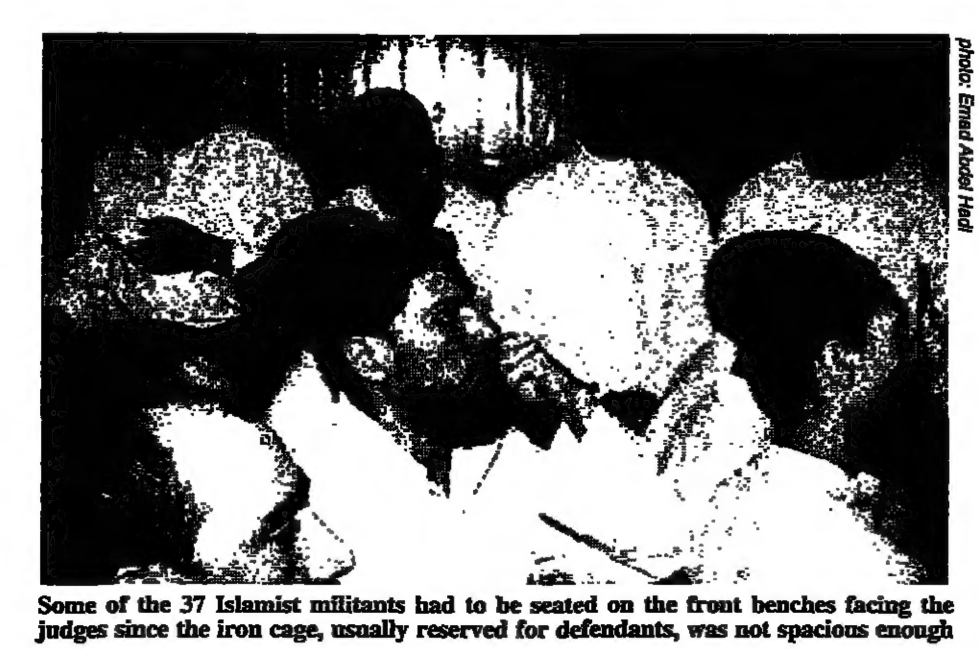


photo: Emad Abdel Hadi

Some of the 37 Islamist militants had to be seated on the front benches facing the judges since the iron cage, usually reserved for defendants, was not spacious enough

Militants' trial opens

The trial of 37 Islamist militants accused of plotting to kill policemen and rob Coptic-owned jewellery shops opened this week in Giza. **Amira Howeidy** witnessed the drama in court

Amidst tight security measures, the trial began on Saturday of 36 men and a teenager who are charged with belonging to the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and plotting to kill policemen and rob Christian jewellers. The case, dubbed a tale of "grand terrorism" by the local press, has been under investigation by the State Security Police since November 1996, producing a 2,000-page dossier.

Hearings began five hours behind schedule as dozens of the defendants' relatives packed the corridors and staircases of the Giza State Security Court complex. When the defendants were finally brought into the courtroom, the sobbing families were ordered to leave the building.

"Islamic! Islamic! — Egypt, may you be Islamic once again!" chanted the defendants as they walked into the courtroom. Brandishing copies of the Qur'an and making victory signs, they shouted: "Despite injustice and tyranny, Egypt will eventually be ruled by Islam." The iron cage usually reserved for the defendants was not spacious enough to accommodate all of them, and several had to be seated on the front benches facing the judges, surrounded by more than 20 policemen.

According to the indictment bill, 27 of the defendants are accused of "belonging to an illegal group which aims at suspending the Constitution, preventing the authorities from discharging their duties, undermining social peace by condemning authorities as apostate and encouraging others to break the law." They are charged with plotting to kill policemen and rob a jewellery shop in Giza owned by a Copt and with possessing unlicensed weapons.

Defence Attorney Moukhtar Nouh asked the court to adjourn hearings "as long as possible" to give lawyers time to study the case.

Lawyer Montasser El-Zayyat, de facto spokesman for the Gama'a, told the court bluntly that "since the whole point of the trial is to reach a fair verdict, the defendants are innocent until they are proven guilty," adding that "until this happens, they should not be imprisoned." The defendants have been in prison since November 1996. Three of them were released but later re-arrested.

In response to the defence team's request, the judge decided to adjourn the hearings until 11 January. He said the juvenile defendant Amr Hassanein would be tried along with the others under a new law allowing the trial and imprisonment of suspected militants below the age of 18. Juveniles were previously tried by special courts before being sent, if found guilty, to a reformatory.

Legal sources said several of the defendants face sentences ranging up to life imprisonment with hard labour.

Earlier, security sources said that eight of the defendants had been extradited from an Arab country, where they had allegedly been active in collecting money from charity organisations to fund the group's activities in Egypt. However, no mention of this was made in the indictment bill.

Security sources said the other defendants were arrested in Giza in 1996 while they were trying to rob the jewellery shop.

El-Alfi versus *Al-Shaab* heats up

As the trial of six journalists accused of slandering Hassan El-Alfi resumed, a lawyer for the interior minister demanded LE10 million in compensation. **Khaled Dawoud** attended



Hassan El-Alfi

The six journalists at *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, arrived early on Monday to a packed courtroom in Abbasiya to attend the second session of their trial on libel charges brought by Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi. Over more than five weeks in July and August, *Al-Shaab* launched a fierce campaign against El-Alfi, accusing him of corruption, abuse of power and misappropriation of public funds. After a period of baffling silence, El-Alfi filed a libel suit against Magdi Ahmed Hussein, *Al-Shaab*'s editor-in-chief, Adel Hussein, deputy secretary-general of the Labour Party and a former editor of *Al-Shaab*, reporters Salah Bedeiwi, Hamdi El-Shami, Hoda Mekkawi and *Al-Shaab*'s cartoonist, Essam El-Sharqawi. Labour Party leader Ibrahim Shukri was also targeted by El-Alfi's case in his capacity as *Al-Shaab*'s publisher, but is not facing criminal charges.

According to Egyptian law, if a libel case is filed by a public official, the accused should stand trial at a criminal court which is empowered to punish them by imprisonment. If convicted, the *Al-Shaab* journalists face up to three years in jail, according to their lawyers.

As hearings resumed, Magdi Hussein and the other five defendants sat in the front bench of the courtroom and were surrounded by photographers, journalists and dozens of lawyers. Hussein was smiling and looking confident. He told reporters that this was a case of freedom of expression and an attempt to affirm the role of the press in fighting corruption. A lawyer representing the Press Syndicate, Sayed Abu Zeid, joined *Al-Shaab*'s defence team, making the point that the Syndicate would defend any of its members, regardless of his political affiliation. All defendants denied the charges of libel and slander when Judge Ismail Shabana asked how they pleaded.

It quickly became clear that the strategy of *Al-Shaab* lawyers was to turn the trial of their defendants into a trial for El-Alfi himself by repeating the allegations which the newspaper had published in July and August.

Thus, the head of the *Al-Shaab* defence team, Islamist lawyer Adel Eid, insisted that the court summon as witnesses El-Alfi himself, his son Adel, a diplomat at the Foreign Ministry whom *Al-Shaab* accused of using his father's influence to make illegal business deals, and the managers of three flour mill companies who, the newspaper alleged, bribed top Interior Ministry officials in return for unspecified favours.

The principal accusation which *Al-Shaab* brought against El-Alfi was that he sold a villa he owned to a former public sector manager, Abdel-Wahab El-Habbak, who was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for corruption, in return for a promise to ensure he escaped trial. Eid asked the court to include all documents of the police investigation in the Habak case and the sentence passed against him in the dossier of El-Alfi's lawsuit. El-Alfi had bought the sea resort villa in 1993 for LE80,000 and later sold it to Habbak in 1996 for LE600,000. Eid also demanded that the court allow him to summon all the witnesses he needed without announcing their names in advance, allegedly to avoid any possible pressure by the Interior Ministry.

Like *Al-Shaab*, the interior minister had at least 10 lawyers representing him in his various capacities: as a civilian, as interior minister and as the head of the police forces. Four other lawyers were also pressing charges against *Al-Shaab* on behalf of the state, and not the prime minister as it was announced at the opening of the trial last month. Another unknown lawyer, Ali Murad, also asked to join El-Alfi's case against *Al-Shaab* on the grounds that he was personally harmed by what the newspaper published in one of its articles in August.

Fathi Ragab, a former member of parliament who heads El-Alfi's defence team, asked the court to reject all the demands made by *Al-Shaab* lawyers. He said they were nothing but delaying tactics, and asked Judge Shabana to start questioning witnesses, who include some top police officers and businessmen coming to testify in El-Alfi's favour.

El-Alfi, who topped the list of witnesses, was not able to attend Monday's session because he was engaged in other important state affairs. Ragab told the court that he filed another case against *Al-Shaab* on Saturday for allegedly trying to influence the course of the trial by publishing more corruption allegations against El-Alfi. Ragab's new case targets nine persons, including the same six defendants, two writers who contribute articles to *Al-Shaab* and Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, head of the Freedoms' Committee at the Press Syndicate and an *Al-Shaab* columnist.

Maher El-Derbi, representing El-Alfi in his capacity as Interior Minister, asked the court to increase the amount of compensation he requested at the opening session from LE1,000 to LE10 million. "We would like to announce right now that whatever compensation the court orders, we will donate it to the families of police officers and other civilians killed by terrorists," he said.

The defendants laughed and jeered at Derbi's announcement. All eyes were directed at the Labour Party leader, Shukri, because legally he is the one who has to pay any damages ordered by the court. One of the main arguments put forward by El-Alfi's lawyers since the start of hearings was that *Al-Shaab* represented Islamist militant groups who have been leading a campaign of terror to overthrow the government since late 1992.

Ragab also argued that the *Al-Shaab* lawyers had no right to ask for new documents in order to make their case against El-Alfi, because these documents should have been in the newspaper's possession already before it published its allegations. In response, *Al-Shaab* lawyer, Eid, told the court that "we have the documents but they are not in our hands right now." El-Alfi's lawyers jumped for joy and asked the court to make a record of Eid's pronouncement which proved their point that *Al-Shaab* published allegations against El-Alfi without possessing any documents to prove them.

Judge Shabana set the next hearings for three days starting 13 December, after approving all the requests made by the *Al-Shaab* defence team, including the summoning of El-Alfi's son, Adel, and bringing in the other documents they asked for.

'Are there elections today?'

The administration said they were honest and open. The opposition said there was foul play. The students could barely be bothered to vote. **Fatemah Farag** follows this year's lacklustre student union elections

Elections for 7,000 student union seats at 12 universities were held on 10 and 11 November, but the voters showed little interest and many of the seats went uncontested. The competing political tendencies were the Islamists, Horus, a social group associated with the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), and the "activity students," a group actively involved in campus sports and arts, who are viewed as close allies of the university administration.

In three consecutive statements this week, the administration made an effort to affirm its adherence to democratic principles. Farouk Ismail, president of Cairo University, announced at the beginning of the week that "the university administration does not favour one group over another and is intent that the elections take place in a democratic environment."

However, according to initial reports from the Egyptian Organisation of Human Rights (EOHR), hundreds of student candidates have been either disqualified or referred to investigation committees — a procedure which automatically disqualifies them under university regulations.

"We have been monitoring Cairo University and hundreds of students have been disqualified by the administration," said Said Abdel-Hafez, a lawyer with EOHR. Some examples given by EOHR include: 100 students, all considered to be Islamists, disqualified at the Faculty of Commerce; 10 students disqualified at the Faculty of Law and two suspended for one week — one on charges of participating in an anti-Israel demonstration. At the Faculty of Science, out of 240 candidates, 150 were disqualified and 20 sent to an investigation committee for putting up signs which read: "Smile ... you're at the Faculty of Science," signed "The Islamist Tendency".

On the whole, however, the elections and campaigning were low-key. On 8 November, about 200 Islamist students staged a march on the Cairo University campus followed by a half-hour sit-in.

The Islamists, usually known for violence at the ballot boxes, appear to have changed their tactics this year. Sweets were distributed with "Islam is the solution" written on the wrappers, and balloons bearing slogans such as: "Who is the best? Islam is the best!".

However, when scores of their candidates were disqualified on 9 November, their tone changed. Dozens of Islamist students stood outside the various faculties where their candidates had been struck off the lists and held up posters calling on students to boycott the elections in protest. In the meantime, disqualified candidates initiated legal action against the university administration, a yearly ritual which always comes to naught. The latest statement by the university administration conceded that 10 lawsuits will be heard by the courts in the next few days and promised that the court decisions would be implemented immediately.

Most student activists interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* claimed, however, that the administration's disqualification of Islamist candidates was not a big issue this year. They blamed the Islamists' poor performance in the elections on their low profile and their generally weak organisation.

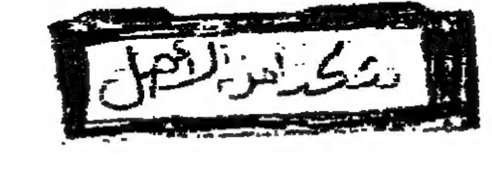
Then there is Horus which, according to some of its activists, was put in a rather awkward position this year. "There was a conflict between the leadership of the group and the university administration. The latter did not want us to participate as representatives of the NDP. They said that would be setting a precedent for politics entering university life and the administration does not want any politics within the university boundaries," said Mohamed Abdel-Salam, a senior Horus activist. To prove his point, he cited the dozens of candidates from the Akhenaton Club — a Horus affiliate — who were disqualified by the administration at the Faculty of Arts.

The true champions of the "no politics" approach, though, are the "activity students". Their main campaign slogan was: "No to the Islamist Trend/No to Horus/Yes to the Activity Students". Even though the administration had called on students not to put up posters on the university walls, not to stage demonstrations and not to use lecture halls for campaigning, students claim that the university administration turned a blind eye while the "activity students" gaily breached these guidelines.

At any rate, the most vivid impression to emerge from the elections was that the number of students taking any active interest in them was extremely limited. "Are there elections today?" Karima Ahmed, a law student, asked apathetically, when approached by the *Weekly*. As Ahmed looked on, students stood around nonchalantly on campus, obviously preoccupied by other things than politics. According to Ali Abdel-Motie, a political science student, "the lack of interest shown by students this year is due to the fact that the majority of seats are uncontested. In many faculties, it is a one-horse race. So there are really no elections."

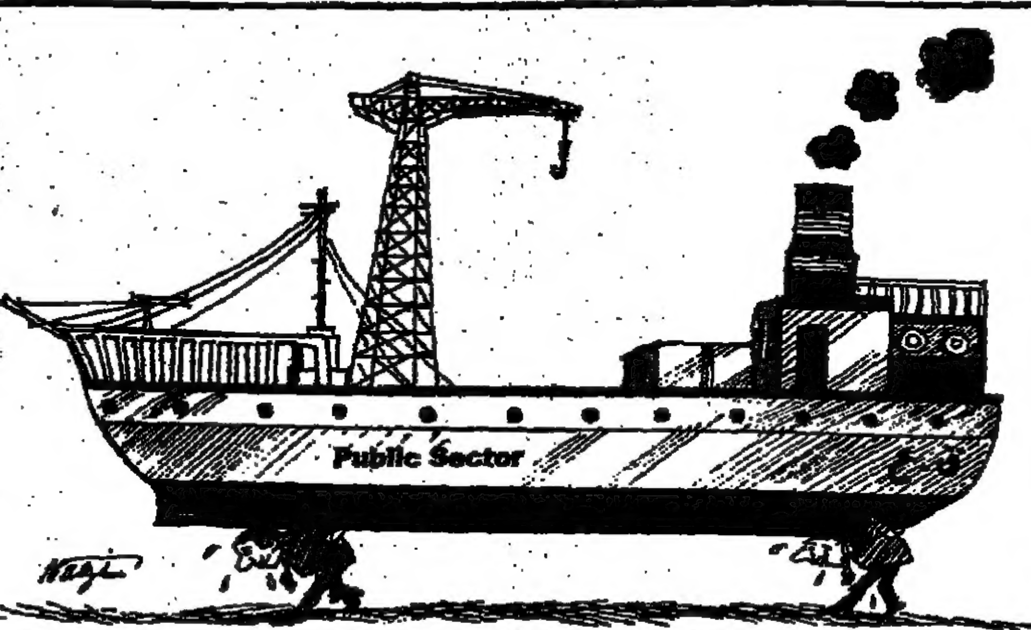
If the required quorum of voters is not reached in any given faculty, the administration has the right to appoint students to fill the council seats. The initial results announced by the administration in the afternoon of the first day showed that five faculties at Cairo University had already been decided because their council seats were uncontested.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**





Shape up and ship out



A cabinet decision to amend a port service law and privatise some port companies will reform Egypt's less than ship-shape port services, say officials. But not everyone is so convinced. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Moving full steam ahead with its privatisation programme, the government this month decided to give the private sector a crack at the state-controlled port services sector.

In its session this week, the Cabinet Privatisation Committee, the government's privatisation decision-making body, approved majority share sales of 10 port service companies. The move came roughly two weeks after a 22 October decision to amend articles 6 and 7 of Law 12 of 1964, which gave the state a virtual monopoly over port services and the maritime transport sector.

The amendments, to be submitted for approval by the People's Assembly during its new session opening this week, came after long-resistance by some officials, who expressed concern that Israel could use this move as a stepping stone into the Egyptian economy.

But proponents of the decision dismiss this, arguing that the move reflects the government's commitment to embracing port service reform as a means of boosting Egypt's exports.

The public sector's decades-long hold over the shipping sector left the country's port system grossly inefficient and outdated, said Saad El-Khawalka, chairman of the PA's Transport and Telecommunications Committee.

But with top officials like Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri now stressing the need to boost Egypt's exports by at least 20 per cent per year, port service reform "is a key area that Egypt must rapidly address if it is to reach its export goal," El-Khawalka told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

According to a report prepared for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) by Nathan Associates Inc., the volume of Egypt's foreign trade in the year 2000 must exceed 1995 figures by $13 billion if the government is to reach its stated real GDP growth rate of seven to eight per cent per year. Egypt's port facilities will witness a similar explosive growth and, in order to cope, must be deregulated, the report stated.

El-Khawalka said that the cabinet's amendment of the maritime transport law will lead to a significant improvement in the standard of port services through the introduction of private competition.

As it currently stands, Article 6 of the law prohibited any ministry, government agency or company in which the state owned at least quarter of the stake from contracting for the transport of any goods or passengers by sea, except through the state-owned maritime transport authority.

This article, added El-Khawalka, gives the transport minister the right to make exceptions to this rule. But the new amendment will make it possible for any of the bodies in question to book or contract any cargoes or passengers through private sector companies.

Unamended, Article 7 prohibited the private sector from involvement in a wide range of maritime transport activities, including loading and unloading ships, establishing port storage facilities and conducting repairs or maintenance on ships.

But if the government seems excited by the recent amendments, the private sector exhibited mixed emotions, at best.

"It's an important move but it is not very significant," said Wael Leheita, chairman of the Egyptian Transport and Commercial Services Company (EGYTRANS), a leading private transport company, which last month concluded a successful public share offering to increase its capital.

"I expect that the private sector will not show much interest in buying the public port service companies slated for sale in the next period," Leheita told the *Weekly*, citing a number of reasons.

In the case of shipping agencies such as the Amoun Company — one of the 10 port companies approved for privatisation — the reason is that these firms are mainly agents of international shipping companies with which they have forged close business relations. These long-standing ties would make it difficult for private firms to easily enter this field.

"For the Egyptian private sector, the activity of shipping agency is not only costly, but has also been dominated by the public sector for too long," he said.

In addition, most of the container handling companies slated for sale are located in Alexandria.

"We all know that container traffic through Alexandria port is very limited," said Leheita. "Many shipping lines even exclude Alexandria in their routings, or limit their activities at the port because of its limited container quay capacity."

For other companies, such as the Suez Mechanical Stevedoring Company and the United Stevedoring companies, both of which are slated for privatisation, private sector reluctance to enter the field will mainly be a result of the fact that these firms require massive changes in structure and size.

Such firms are not only overstaffed, but their stevedoring equipment is inefficient.

"Prospective buyers will have to invest a tremendous amount of money to restructure fiscally unsound companies," said Leheita.

Along with these problems, Leheita also argued that 30 years of socialist-inspired monopolies of the port sector means that what Egypt now has to offer ships are shoddy facilities and inefficiency in the port. The country, he said, has lost its advantage, especially in the case of the Suez Canal which handles about 60 ships per day.

"Many refuse now to stop at Port Said or Suez due to the poor service and excessive charges," he emphasised.

Despite concerns, other businessmen have been quick to appland the cabinet committee's decision to privatise the port service firms.

Not only are most of the firms slated for privatisation profitable, said Abdel-Wahab Qouta, chairman of the Port Said Businessmen's Association, but the government's overall strategy involves liberalising the port service sector as a whole.

Also earning a hats-off from Qouta is the government's plan to sign management contracts with several major international port service companies to run the port operations and services in Port Said and Damietta to boost their efficiency.

As part of this plan, the government and private sector should also cooperate in such areas as improving the customs clearing system, establishing multi-purpose quays, building waiting berths for freighters and increasing freight storage space.

Businessmen's feelings aside, however, the decision to privatise these port services along with passing the amendments through parliament is not the last word.

Some old-guard MPs, such as Mohamed Qiwita of Damietta, argued that selling public port service companies could open the door for unwelcome visitors.

"These strategic companies could fall into Israeli hands under the name of 'strategic investor'," said Qiwita.

Fueling Qiwita's concerns was a 1995 visit to the port of Damietta by David Sultan, the former Israeli ambassador to Egypt.

Sultan's visit, during which he revealed the interest of some Israeli companies in purchasing the Damietta Container and Cargo Handling Company, set off alarm bells inside the parliamentarian's head.

The purchase offer was part of Israel's effort to dull the competitive edge of this Egyptian port city, especially after Israel had just recently allocated $2 billion to upgrade the port cities of Ashdod and Haifa, linking them by rail.

Qiwitta's concerns, though not shared by all, have raised eyebrows and prompted Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid to decide that the government will sell off only 10 per cent of its stake in the company. For national security reasons, he said, the government will retain the majority stake.

The government-owned companies to be privatised are: Amoun; Abu Simbel; Canal; Memphis Shipping Agencies; the Egyptian Company for Maritime Transport; Alexandria Container Handling Company; the Egyptian Marine Supply and Contracting Company; the Egyptian Shipbuilding and Repair Company; Suez Mechanical Stevedoring Company; and the United Stevedoring Company.

Mobile phone fantasy comes true

Waiting to get a mobile phone? Wait a little longer. The government has decided to privatise the industry, to the relief of customers, investors and the system's current operator, writes **Amira Howeidy**

As welcome a surprise as a clear mobile phone reception in a steel room, the cabinet last week decided on the total privatisation of the mobile telecommunications system.

Two months ago, the cabinet had decided that the National Telecom Organisation (ARENTO) would hold onto 30 per cent of the mobile phone industry's shares, with the remaining 70 per cent to be shouldered by individual investors, as well as public and private companies.

But this latest decision — a dramatic about face for the government — has caught everyone by surprise, including ARENTO and, hope subscribers and investors, will help resolve many of the difficulties dogging the industry.

Critics of the current mobile phone system, launched during the 1996 Third Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference in Cairo, argued that it was inefficient, too expensive and the bills were often inaccurate.

Nevertheless, the number of subscribers grew rapidly, ultimately leading to the expansion of the network into an area that covers greater Cairo, the neighbouring industrial cities, the northern coast and parts of Upper Egypt and Sinai.

As part of the cabinet's decision, a new private sector company will be set up to run the system, and its shares are slated to go on sale by the end of the year. Until then, however, ARENTO will continue to operate the network.

"We hope to cater to 100,000 subscribers by next January," Abdallah Abbas, head of ARENTO's central administration and the mobile phone division, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Compared to the amount of time we had to do all this (expansion), what we have accomplished so far is a success."

Still, officials at ARENTO seem pleased that they have been relieved of the costly responsibility of the mobile phone industry. So far, the company has earned about LE144 million from subscriptions alone.

But, "investments on the mobile's infrastructure turned out to be too costly," said Abbas. "If we are to expand the service throughout the entire country, then massive investments are needed."

The company came under fire by subscribers who complained that the service was often not accessible, even in parts of Cairo. ARENTO officials, however, explain that much of the delay in service expansion was due to the fact that apartment building landlords often refused to allow the company to set up their systems on roof tops, fearing structural damages.

"ARENTO's main function is to expand telephone service into the villages and the poor areas, and with the formation of this new company, we will have more time and resources to do this," he said.

Before the responsibility for the industry changes hands, ARENTO still has to fulfil some prior expansion commitments, such as moving into part of Sinai, and setting up another 10 stations around Cairo. Fifty-two stations, costing LE52 million, have already been set up in the capital.

ARENTO also plans on adding Internet access and fax capabilities to the existing system, and agreements to be signed on "roaming" systems will allow subscribers in Egypt to use their phones while in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Amman and vice versa.

The cabinet's decision is also bound to affect the cost and quality of the service, which many have complained was too high and too erratic.

"Private investments will also work in the interest of the customer, as increased competition will lead to a reduction in fees," said Abbas. ARENTO currently charges LE2,000 for installation of a line, a monthly subscription fee of LE160, LE100 in insurance and 60 piastres per minute on calls. Calls on regular phones cost 15 piastres for every three minutes.

"ARENTO did a very good job over the past year," said an official at Alcatel, the French-owned telecommunications company which manufactures and installs the network.

Still, "Cairo alone needs between 35 to 40 more stations in order to serve the current number of subscribers," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The consumers need to understand that this is an endless process — more users means more equipment."

Market report

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Transactions up

THE CAPITAL market's General Index suffered a marginal loss of 0.67 points to settle at 363.08 on 6 November. However, the volume of transactions increased to LE413 million compared to LE292 million in the pervious week.

Another event was the opening of subscription in the capital increase of Arab Insurance Group (Arig) which is the first company to be listed in a number of Arab stock exchanges, among which is Egypt, at the same time. After increasing its capital, Arig, established in 1980 as a joint stock company owned by the governments of Libya, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, will be transformed into a private sector company.

Suez Cement, a pioneer in the Egyptian cement industry, returned into market spotlight, as it invited investors to subscribe in one million of its shares. The volume of the offering, to be closed on 19 November, might be increased to 4 million shares depending on demand. This occurred one year after the company issued 20 per cent of its equity in the form of Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) on the London Stock Exchange.

Trading in shares of Industrial and Engineering Enterprises cornered 16 per cent of the overall market transactions with LE69 million worth of its shares changing hands.

Housing bonds 83/1998 were the market's biggest winner as it acquired a 20 per cent increase to settle at LE67.2. Olympic Group for Financial Investments shouldered the biggest loss, 10.6 per cent, closing at LE14.5.

Marketing 'a good story'

PARTICIPANTS in a seminar held last week discussed different strategies to create an ideal scenario for attracting more foreign investments to Egypt. Sherine Abdel-Razek attended.

Marketing Egypt abroad was the focus of the second in a series of four symposia held by Binational Fulbright Commission in Egypt to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Salzburg Seminar on economics and social sciences.

Entitled "Economies in Transition: Attracting Foreign Investments", the seminar was attended by bankers, businessmen and economists, and tackled the issue of ways of attracting foreign investments to Egypt.

"We have a good story, why don't we tell it to the whole world," said Lola Zaklama, president of Rada Marketing Research Centre and Public Relations. Zaklama was referring to the fact that while Egypt's reform initiatives have brought about stable and promising macroeconomic indicators, the country still lacks the necessary publicity.

Another participant, Mohamed Ozlap, senior general manager of Misr International Bank, underlined the importance of cooperation between businessmen's associations, export councils and the government to promote Egypt as an investment-friendly country.

Similarly, multinational firms must be attracted to Egypt because they are major investment vehicles and lead to an increase in competition.

Ozlap suggested that more efforts should be made to promote some of the sectors in which Egypt has a comparative advantage for attracting foreign investments such as tourism, software manufacturing and the automotive industry.

One obstacle hampering foreign investment flow to Egypt is the country's legal structure, said attorney Amr Zaki Abdel-Motaal. Law students, prosecutors and magistrates still need training to cope with the new capital market, arbitration and investment laws.

Another means of boosting foreign investments, said participants, would be to accelerate the privatisation of some key sectors and companies such as EgyptAir and the telecommunications sector. The government this week announced that mobile phone networks would be privatised.

Mercedes Egypt-class

GERMANY's Mercedes Benz last week inaugurated its first assembly plant in Egypt, representing an investment of over LE150 million. The factory has a capacity of 5,000 cars annually, and 2,500 will be produced during the first phase of operations. The first cars to be produced in the new factory will be E Class 200 models.

The local component of the assembled car will reach 40 per cent — the minimum required under current regulations in order for manufacturers to benefit from the reduced tariff rates on imported parts. The use of local components will reduce the sales price of the car by around 40 per cent, bringing the cost down from LE500,000 to LE290,000.

Ibrahim Fawzy, head of the General Investment Authority, pointed out, while inaugurating the new plant, that this project is "testimony to the Egyptian government's success in attracting the private sector."

The factory, which employs 280 individuals, is located on an area of 60,000 square metres in 6th of October City, and is owned by the Egyptian-German Automotive Company (EGA), a joint-venture between the Egyptian National Automotive Trading Company and Germany's Daimler-Benz.

Fund activity

THE EGYPT Fund Ltd, managed by Hermes Financial Management (Egypt), recently closed a conversion shares issue with over $30 million in subscription orders.

Listed on the Irish Stock Exchange, the fund is a closed-end fund with quarterly redemptions and subscriptions. The fund, which began its operations a year ago, deals in Egyptian shares.

It boasts a capital of around $43 million, accumulated through two previous issues.

The new issue will be converted into ordinary shares when investments in its portfolio reach 85 per cent, or in six months time.

Boosting Egypt-Africa ties

THIS month Foreign Minister Amr Moussa will present the cabinet with a report on ways to boost relations, particularly on the economic front, between Egypt and its African neighbours, specifically sub-Saharan countries.

According to Mohamed Shaaban, assistant to the foreign minister on African affairs, the report proposes a comprehensive strategy to expand Egyptian exports and investments in these countries.

The report, said Shaaban, affirmed the need to give priority to economic cooperation with the countries of the Nile Basin and the African Horn "because these are obviously countries of strategic interest to Egypt."

The second priority proposed in the report are the African states which have seen "high rates of economic development over the last 10 years like South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal."

The report also underlined the necessity for Egypt to respond to requests made by some African countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania, to develop water resources for the purpose of building hydroelectric stations.

In Shaaban's words: "The report argues that with only eight per cent of the volume of Egyptian trade going to Africa, there is a great room for improvement."

Currently, Egypt's highest total volume of trade with any African state does not reach $1 million. In most cases the figure is much smaller.

This year, Moussa went on two tours to southern and western Africa to promote better economic relations between Egypt and these states. Accompanying Moussa were a number of businessmen who reported that they found great potential for trade with, and investment in, these states. Some deals have already been signed between the Egyptian entrepreneurs and their African counterparts and African governments.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

'When will it end?'

Nabil Negm, Iraqi ambassador to the Arab League, tells **Sherine Bahaa** that Iraq is ready for anything, including a US military strike

How do you interpret the recent change in Iraqi policy towards the UN after years of compliance? And why did the change take place at this particular time?
Iraq did not accept the principle of sanctions. Sanctions were imposed on Iraq as a result of unfair resolutions. However, we were committed to the UN Security Council resolutions and hoped that their implementation would eventually lead to the lifting of the sanctions, as stated directly in Security Council Resolution 687.

This resolution commits Iraq to disabling its mass destruction weapons, and establishing a system for monitoring the weapons industry inside Iraq. But this same resolution also contains a commitment that sanctions should be lifted once these conditions have been met. Iraq calls for the full implementation of this resolution, as for its part it has already done all that was required of it.

Iraq has had no weapons of mass destruction since 1992. Despite this fact, Iraq has seen the UN Special Commission for disarming Iraq, UNSCOM, subjected to American pressure to extend the existing sanctions and, consequently, the sufferings of the Iraqi people. It also became clear that the mission was being used to realise US objectives against Iraq. Those objectives were clearly stated by various US officials who constantly reiterated that even if Iraq fulfilled all the conditions inposed on it by the UN Security Council, sanctions would not be lifted until there was a change in the political regime within Iraq. In other words, they want to interfere in our internal affairs.

Iraq was at first a passive observer of these events, hoping that one day UNSCOM would do us justice. Unfortunately, the UN Commission has been turned into an American institution. Since 1991, Iraq has received 305 inspection missions. Of the 3,287 members of UNSCOM who visited Iraq, 720 were Americans. The missions placed 3,850 sites under full monitoring, including laboratories, factories, research centres and universities. Furthermore, they also went as far as destroying purely civilian equipment of great value to Iraq.

Meanwhile, the information which should have been relayed to UNSCOM through the U2 spy airplane was going, instead, to the CIA where it was used to select targets for US retaliatory strikes. The total flying time of the US plane over Iraq between 1 June 1992 and now, November 1997, has reached 1,691 hours. In addition, helicopters belonging to the UN mission responsible for aerial surveillance have performed 5,800 flying hours during the same period.

At the same time, the American, British and French air forces, which have imposed an air embargo on southern Iraq outside of the UN Security Council resolutions framework, have carried out about 120,000 sorties. Despite all this, a fair report was still not presented by the mission to support Iraq's call for implementing clause 22 of Resolution 687. The authorities in Baghdad, therefore, concluded that American inspectors were behind the problems that have emerged between the mission and Iraq.

The Iraqi leadership have had no alternative but to act so as to protect the Iraqi people from genocide, which is a direct violation of their legitimate right to life.

Iraq is not refusing to deal with the mission; on the contrary, the regime wants to cooperate with the inspection team — but there should be no American participation in that mission.

What are the attitudes of the Arab countries towards Iraq since the latest escalation? And were there any Arab attempts to intervene in the latest crisis between Iraq and the US?
Iraq enjoys a strong relationship with a number of Arab countries, and we are ready to improve our relations with the rest. There is an understanding, not only among the Arabs but also in the international community at large, that Iraq has the right to know, after seven and a half years of embargo, when the sanctions will be lifted.

Iraq cannot bargain over the future of its people interminably. Iraq is only calling for more serious and practical steps to be taken towards lifting the sanctions.

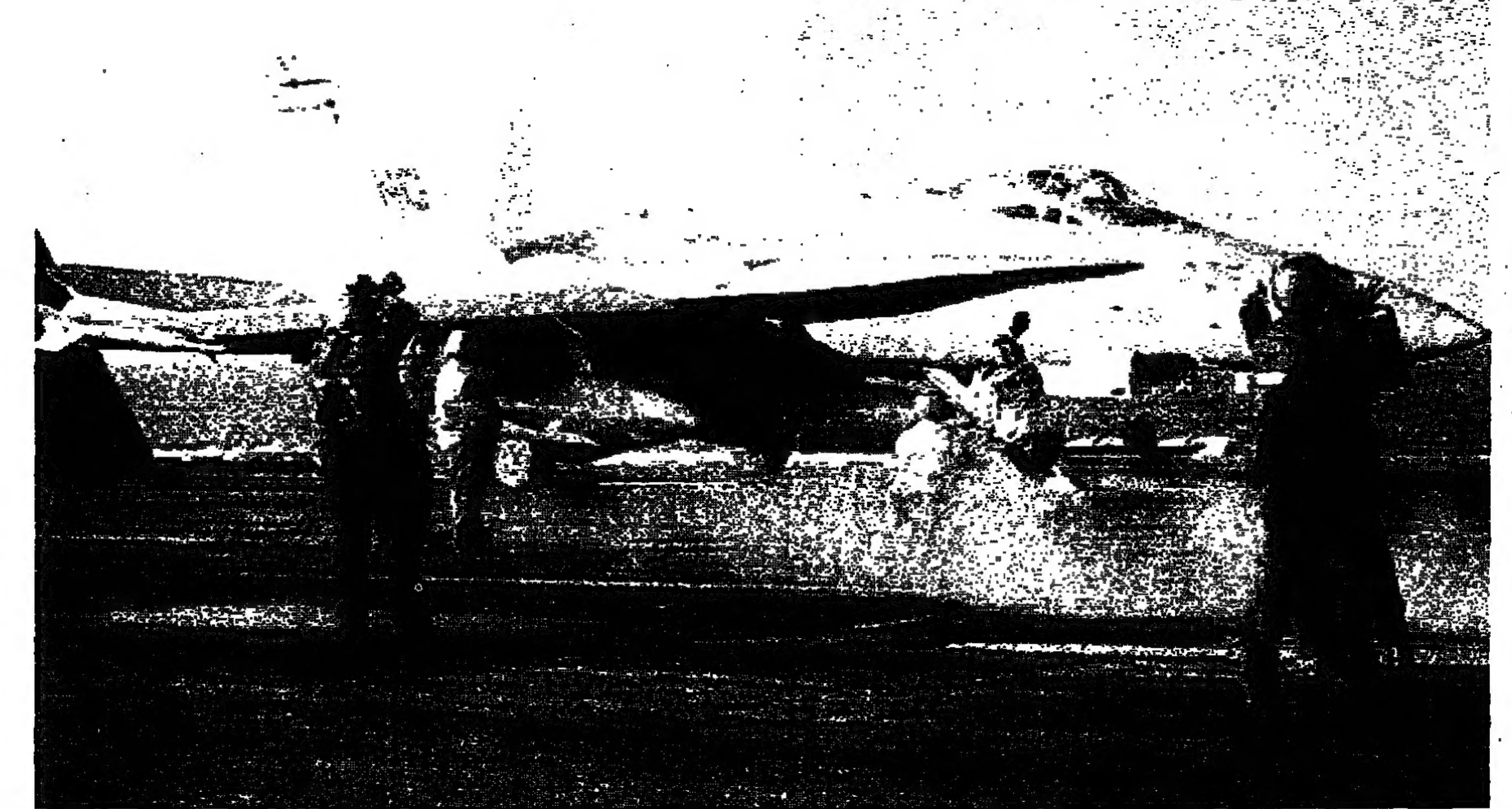
Iraq intially welcomed the appointment of Richard Butler as head of UNSCOM after Rolf Ekeus. However, the tone changed shortly afterwards. Why was that?
It was his statement after his appointment that he would try to be impartial and objective in his mission which made us welcome his appointment. This is exactly what we have been asking for from the Security Council and from the UN missions to Baghdad. But if he is going to adopt the same tactics as Ekeus, we will not be able to tolerate the situation much longer.

The head of the Iraqi air force said that Iraq is preparing for a US military strike. Do you expect such a strike?
We are ready for every option, and we fully expect the US may act as foolishly as it did in 1991 and 1996. However, I would like to stress that military action will not solve the problem, but can only add further complications to the ongoing tragedy.

It has been said that Iraq is relying too much on the split within the Security Council between the US and Britain on one side, and France, Russia and China on the other. Do you agree?
We are not depending upon other people's differences. We simply have a right and we are defending it. There are countries which are able to foresee certain facts and behave accordingly, and they refused to vote for a new and unjust resolution at the Security Council's meeting last month.

We are not calling for a violation of any international resolution. On the contrary, we are asking for the resolution to be implemented.

For some, this latest escalation is a new manoeuvre on the part of Baghdad, which it can afford because Iraq has nothing left to lose. Is this true?
The continuation of the embargo is a loss in itself. Iraq has discovered that it had no alternative but to seek an escalation of the situation, if it is to prevent the state of the country from deteriorating even further.



A military aircraft on board USS carrier Nimetz in the Gulf preparing to take-off on one of its regular missions to monitor the no-fly zone in southern Iraq (photo: AFP)

All bets are go?

The standoff in the Iraqi crisis and the announced confrontation between Iraq and the United States (or the United Nations, as Washington insists on saying) is currently in a stalemate. **Thomas Gorguissian** reports from Washington

According to UN diplomats, the three-man UN mission, headed by former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Ibrahim, which was sent to Baghdad last week in an attempt to defuse the crisis over the participation of Americans in UN teams monitoring the destruction of Iraqi weapons, failed to achieve its mission.

However, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, after meeting Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Aziz on Monday, expressed some hope that the impasse will be ended quickly. "I hope all is not lost and that there is still some room to manoeuvre over the next day or two." On the same day, an American U-2 spy plane flew safely over Iraq despite earlier Iraqi threats to shoot it down.

After his meetings with Annan and the current chairman of the Security Council, a Chinese representative, Aziz expressed his concerns over the "unbalanced composition of the Special Commission" (UNISCOM) monitoring the destruction of Iraqi weapons. He said that everything is controlled and dominated by Americans. Aziz told reporters: "We are in a situation where the adversary is the judge. The US will not agree to lifting the sanctions unless the leadership of Iraq is changed. That is the well-known declared policy of that country." Aziz also criticised the nature of the U-2 spy-plane missions over Iraq, disputing Washington's claims that the plane was merely collecting information for the UN. The truth, he said, is that all the information collected by the plane goes to the Pentagon to prepare for US military strikes against Iraq.

On Monday night, the UN Security Council met for two and a half hours to discuss the growing crisis. Before the meeting, US ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson told reporters that he would ask the Council to adopt a "strong resolution" condemning Iraq. "The United States wants to see a strong unified Security Council with a resolution that is punitive, that is resolute, that is direct, and that gets unanimity," he said. He added that if the Security Council refused US demands, "all bets are go, all options are open."

A draft resolution, drawn up by the US and Britain, circulated among the Council's 15 members on Tuesday, threatened "serious consequences" if Baghdad does not comply with its demands. Press reports, however, have drawn attention to Russian and French demands that the Americans tone down the resolution, satisfying themselves with the word, "consequences" minus the "serious." According to UN diplomats, the US is seeking a resolution which clearly states that Iraq is in violation of Security Council resolutions, adopted according to Chapter Seven of the UN Charter which allows for the use of force in the case of Iraqi non-compliance.

The US is also proposing to immediately put into effect a resolution approved by the Security Council late last month — Resolution 1134 — threatening to impose a travel ban on Iraqi officials should their government continue to hinder the progress of UNISCOM inspectors. Opposition to the resolution by five Security Council members — France, Russia, China, Egypt and Kenya — last month resulted in the toning down of the resolution and delayed any possible measures by six months.

In addition to seeking the implementation of tougher measures against Iraq, the US this week sought to round up its former Gulf War allies. Over the weekend, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright conferred by telephone with her Russian and French counterparts — Yevgency Primakov, and Hubert Vedrine respectively — in an effort to ensure their support.

Meanwhile, the crisis has dominated the media in the US. President Bill Clinton, the secretary of state and the National Security Adviser, Sandy Berger, appeared on television screens across the country, explaining the situation in Iraq and the US' tough stand.

The media has also reported on the hostility expressed by some section of the Arab media towards the possible US military option. The focus of most columnists and political analysts, however, has been on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and the "threat that they represent to the region and to the rest of the world." Some columnists have referred to "unfinished [US] business" in the Gulf, asking whether or not the administration is considering an attempt to topple Saddam.

At the same time that diplomatic efforts were under way in New York, it was announced that Defence Secretary William Cohen and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Henry Shelton, had postponed a scheduled trip to Asia. Some observers have interpreted this as a sign of a possible showdown between the US and Iraq. "We will keep our range of options open," General Shelton said.

Personal attacks on the Iraqi leader have been another feature of the US political debate this week. On CBS News' "Face the Nation" programme on Sunday night, Albright attacked Iraqi President Saddam Hussein saying that, "he is just a congenital liar and we have to remember that." The following day, when a reporter sought Aziz's reaction to this attack and asked him if it was instead Albright who was the liar, Aziz replied, "I'd hope that she wouldn't be, but unfortunately she is." On the same day, Ambassador Richardson told reporters, "I found the insult of the Secretary of State personally offensive. This battle should not be personal. It obviously is."

Coming to grips with crisis

As 200,000 supporters of Israel's peace movements converged on Tel Aviv to observe the second anniversary of Yitzak Rabin's assassination, a smaller but perhaps equally significant gathering was taking place in the West Bank, writes **Graham Usher** from Ramallah

In the plush setting of Ramallah's Grand Park Hotel, around 300 Palestinian academics and political and community activists last weekend attended a conference on democracy and transitions to statehood in the Third World, organised by the Palestinian NGO Muwatin, or citizen.

Over two days, expert speakers addressed problems of nation-building in South Africa, Pakistan, the Philippines, Algeria and Jordan. Most interest, however, focused on those contributions from local academics which addressed the current crisis in the Palestinian national movement, a crisis which the Oslo process has aggravated, if not caused. If the conference had significance, it was due to the common recognition not only that there is a crisis, but that all of the PLO factions and Palestinian NGOs are a part of it. The recognition has been a long time coming.

In one of the most important contributions to the conference, Palestinian academic and Muwatin Trustee, George Giacaman, tried to put the crisis in historical context. Prior to and during the Intifada, he said, the Palestinian left had wielded considerable influence in the Occupied Territories. The Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) — the grassroots national body that led the Intifada — consisted not only of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, but equally of the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian People's (formerly communist) Party (PPP). With the end of the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, their influence waned. This, said Giacaman, was due to the PLO opposition's inability to come to grips with the new realities of a post-Cold War world.

"In rejecting the 1991 Madrid conference, the PLO opposition found itself no longer able to influence the Palestinian political process," said Giacaman. The result "was an opposition removed from Palestinian politics". Combined with its abstention from Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections in 1996, the upshot of this self-imposed isolation is today a PLO opposition riven by splits (especially between its "inside" and "outside" cadres) and commanding less than six per cent support among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Nor has what was once a vibrant Palestinian NGO sector fared much better. Prior to Madrid, Palestinian NGOs had assumed a dual role of providing services and mobilising Palestinians against the occupation. They were "an infrastructure of resistance," said Palestinian doctor and head of the Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, Mustafa Barghouti.

With the ebb of the national struggle, however, many of the NGOs opted for professionalisation rather than a mass constituency and became dependent on foreign funders. They were thus powerless when faced with the establishment of a Palestinian Authority (PA), which viewed with suspicion both the NGO's funds and their political influence in civil society. The result has been a concerted and successful effort by the PA to marginalise the role of NGOs in post-Oslo Palestinian politics.

In trying to address the causes of these declines, many speakers pointed out the "unique situation" Oslo had imposed on the Palestinian national movement. On the one hand, Oslo had entrusted the PA with certain state-building powers, especially in the areas of civic services and domestic legislation. On the other, it had also left the occupation in place, with Israel not only controlling 97 per cent of the West Bank (and 40 per cent of Gaza) but actively augmenting its settlement there.

This dual challenge, said PLC member, Azmi Shuaibi, had led to a contradiction between the "revolutionary legitimacy" embodied by the PLO to continue the struggle against occupation and the "constitutional legitimacy" represented by newly elected bodies such as the PLC. The task of the PLO factions and the NGOs, he said, was to strike a "non-coercive balance" between these two legitimacies and to build a cross-factional coalition that would ensure that the new PA institutions would be democratic rather than "militarised".

Other speakers were less sanguine that such a balance could be achieved. In a particularly brave address, Giacaman said that the current crisis was due not only to the Oslo Accords, but to the "model of state-building" the PLO had brought with it when it returned to Palestine in 1994. In exile, said Giacaman, the PLO had been at once a government, with a political leadership and its own military structures, and a society, running an array of civic institutions on behalf of Palestinians. Transplanted to the Occupied Territories, however, such a model became "a formula for swallowing society", with the PLO/PA trying to take over political parties and NGOs rather than letting them exist as free and independent national organisations outside its control. The consequence is a tendency to "totalitarianism" throughout Palestinian society and a grave weakening of the national struggle against Israel.

"Our internal situation is related to our external situation," said Giacaman. For "without democratic accountability, a real political opposition and a functioning PLC, our leadership will be vulnerable to pressure from Israel and the US".

Such views are unlikely to be welcomed by the PLO/PA leadership, no matter how much support they enjoyed at the conference, including from among the many Fatah activists there. Yet — as Muwatin Chairman and Palestinian member of the Knesset Azmi Bishara commented — the debate initiated at the Grand Park Hotel should not be read as a "curse" on the PA. "If we have advocated democracy as the only system of governance for Palestinians, this is because we see democracy as a continuation of the liberation struggle, not a critique of it," he said.

More slaughter in Algeria

AT LEAST 26 civilians were killed in Algeria early this week by suspected members of Algeria's most violent militant organisation, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). According to Algerian newspapers, the killings took place near the town of Blida, south of Algiers. This incident brings the number of dead in the aftermath of last month's elections to 48, following a massacre in the western town of Tlemcen last week.

The massacre near Blida was the latest in a nearly six-year-old insurgency that has left an estimated 80,000 people dead.

The gang of 30 men who carried out the attack used explosives to blow open the doors of homes in Lahmalit, near Blida. They then began a two-hour frenzy, slaughtering inhabitants of the houses, many of whom were children, aged three months to 12 years, and women. Most of the victims had their throats cut. In some cases bodies were mutilated or burned.

The GIA has claimed responsibility for the majority of the attacks which have been carried out against the civilian population. The GIA has vowed to kill all those not supporting its fight against the regime.

Outside Algeria, pressure for an international inquiry into the slaughters is mounting. However Algeria's president, Lamine Zeroual, has recently reiterated that he would not permit any "attempt to interfere" in his country's affairs, nor would he "accept lessons from anyone" when it came to human rights.

Hunger strike in Bethlehem

NEARLY 900 Palestinians imprisoned in Bethlehem by the Israeli authorities threatened on Saturday to launch a hunger strike in support of a woman prisoner, Itaf Al-Ayyan, who has refused food for 18 days.

Eissa Qaraqeh, the head of the Bethlehem-based Palestinian human rights group, Prisoners' Club, announced that the prisoners, who are held without charges or trial under administrative detention orders, would start an open-ended hunger strike when Al-Ayyan's hunger strike reaches its 20th day. Al-Ayyan is a member of the Islamic Jihad group, and has been on hunger strike since her arrest on 21 October.

Israel holds almost 880 Palestinians in administrative detention, according to Prisoners' Club figures.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International, at the opening of the 19th United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) in Geneva this week, stated that "Israel is defying the Committee's recommendations, made at its last session in May, by its continued use of torture and ill-treatment [of prisoners] and its failure to submit a new report to CAT at this session."

At its last session, CAT found that interrogation methods employed by Israel constituted torture. They included restraining detainees in very painful positions, sleep deprivation for long periods, hooding and subjection to death threats and violent shaking. So far, Israel has refused to comply with the Committee's recommendation to stop these forms of torture.

Turkey frees blind lawyer

TURKEY freed a blind human rights lawyer, jailed for Kurdish separatist propaganda, last Sunday for health reasons.

Esber Yagmurdereli, 52, was released from Cankiri provincial prison, some 130 kilometres north of Ankara, under a legal procedure which suspends the execution of his sentence for one year.

Yagmurdereli's incarceration had drawn protests from several Western governments and Turkish and foreign human rights organisations. Turkish president, Suleyman Demirel, said he was prepared to pardon Yagmurdereli, but the lawyer declined to petition for it.

In 1978 Yagmurdereli was sentenced to life in prison for armed subversive activities. He was released on parole in 1991. However, he was jailed again on 19 October this year after losing an appeal against a 10-month sentence he received for spreading propaganda on behalf of Kurdish separatists. His parole from his life sentence was then revoked and he was expected to serve the 23 years remaining of the earlier 36-year term.

Political ground lost

Following an election that saw the re-emergence of family and tribal loyalties as a dominant political force, Jordan looks set to usher in the 21st century with a weak and ineffective parliament. Lola Keilani reports from Amman



Jordanian Bedouin women relatives of a tribal candidate who won a seat in parliamentary elections celebrate his victory near Amman *(photo: Reuters)*

The decision by Jordanian opposition parties, led by the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing the Islamic Action Front (IAF), to boycott last week's parliamentary elections dealt a severe blow to the country's immediate prospects for open and effective parliamentary decision making. It was an election in which political parties played almost no role. Instead, family and tribal loyalties dominated both candidates' platforms and voter decisions.

Observers suggest that it will be years before Jordan makes up the ground lost to "tribal politics" in last week's elections. They say that the new "domesticated" parliament which has emerged as a result of the elections represents a significant setback for democracy and pluralism in Jordan. The new parliament is seen as being composed of deputies who regard politics as a service industry rather than as a genuine political and economic undertaking. It is suggested that many of those MPs elected last week are not qualified to deal with the complicated issues which will face the parliament over the next few years. Such issues include the resettlement of refugees in Jordan and final status negotiations over Jerusalem.

With all 17 female candidates failing to win seats in the new parliament, last week's elections are also seen as a setback for the Jordanian women's movement. This collective failure came despite optimistic predictions in the run-up to the election.

Refuting opposition claims that the new parliament is dominated by the government and its sympathisers, Mazan Armouti, a spokesman for the government, said that 18 out of the 80 newly elected deputies are "opposition figures." He described this figure as "comfortable." "Opposition deputies make up approximately 22 per cent of the [new parliament]," he said. He added that while many independents were elected on the basis of tribal loyalties, a large number are also affiliated with modern and progressive opposition parties. Seven Islamists — including two former members of the IAF and five former members of the Muslim Brotherhood — two Baathists, two leftists, and one communist have been elected to the new parliament. The IAF and Brotherhood members were dismissed from their parties as a result of their decisions to renege on an IAF and Brotherhood-supported election boycott.

Prominent columnists, however, have criticised the makeup of the new parliament, particularly its claims to representing an independent voice in Jordan. They have pointed out that there is a big difference between candidates claiming Islamist credentials and members of the IAF representing the party and its political agenda. Fakhri Kawar, a leading columnist and former deputy, said that while a number of the newly elected deputies may indeed be Islamists, they are not authorised by the IAF or the Brotherhood to express party demands.

Jamil Abu Bakr, spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, emphasised the independent status of the seven successful Islamist candidates. He said that all other members of the Brotherhood had abided by the boycott. The boycott was called by nine opposition parties and prominent political figures, including two former prime ministers, immediately prior to the election.

Bakr also criticised the composition of the new parliament. "Although the government was keen on introducing members of all political persuasions into the new parliament, the successful opposition candidates are by no means representative of an 'institutionalised opposition'," he said. Because of this, it is suggested that the current opposition deputies will not be as effective as those in the previous parliament. In the old parliament, opposition deputies — from both the left and the right — were known for their unified stands. As for the present parliament, analysts see little prospect of an effective and organised opposition group emerging.

Last week's elections have also been clouded by accusations of irregularities and fraud. Some of these accusations have been supported by documentary evidence.

At a press conference held in Amman this week, Toujan Faisal, an outspoken former deputy, claimed that the election results were rigged and called for their cancellation. Faisal, who lost her bid for re-election to the lower house, said that the law had not been respected and stated that she had documents which proved that the elections were forged. "I will not sit idle," she said. "I will contest the election results even if that requires going to the United Nations." During the press conference, she also claimed that her life, along with the lives of her children, was in danger. She did not, however, say who or what she feared, citing only her outspokenness as the basis for her concern.

Faisal, who is the only woman ever to have been elected to the Jordanian parliament, lost her seat by fewer than 1,000 votes to former ambassador and Ministry of Information official, Nayef Mowla. According to Faisal, Mowla's campaign was heavily supported by the government.

A candidate from the Adwan tribe also claims that the election results were manipulated by the government. The candidate was initially told that he had won his seat. However, three hours later, after the alleged intervention of the Minister of the Interior, Natheer Rashid, the candidate was told that he had lost the seat by two votes to a former ministry of interior official. The candidate intends to file a case against Rashid, claiming that the election results were forged.

The outcome of the elections, and the resulting weak parliament, has created a powerful incentive for opposition groups to operate outside of the parliamentary process, the Muslim Brotherhood has warned. Under the banner of the National Reform Forces (NRF), the Brotherhood has so far rallied the support of nine opposition political parties, prominent independent figures and professional associations. With the help of the media, non-governmental organisations and any other organisations willing and able to expose alleged government misconduct, the group is attempting to form an effective Jordanian opposition movement. It is expected that the NRF will attempt to organise mass demonstrations in the coming weeks.

Nothing resolved in Nairobi

Did Washington impose sanctions to strengthen the hands of the southern Sudanese at the Nairobi talks, asks Gamal Nkrumah

Talks between Sudanese government officials and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) representatives in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on 28 October were pronounced an "abysmal failure" following a United States government decision to impose a trade embargo against Sudan. The talks, the first in three years, were held in an attempt to negotiate an end to the civil war which has gripped the country for the past 13 years. Half way during the talks the US issued an executive order freezing Sudanese assets in the US, prohibiting trade with Sudan and barring any financial dealings with the war-torn country.

Since it began in 1984, Sudan's civil war has claimed an estimated 1.5 million lives, leaving hundreds of thousands more injured and homeless. In financial terms, the war has cost more than $350 million and has left the Sudanese economy in tatters. Inflation is running at approximately 100 per cent, per capita gross national product is a mere $250, and the country is struggling to meet soaring foreign debt repayments. Malaysia recently came to Sudan's rescue following Sudan's failure to repay an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan of $20 million. Sudan's budget deficit, excluding interest on foreign debt, increased from $566 million in 1995 to $764 million in 1996.

While the Nairobi talks are — in principle, if nothing else — a positive step along the road to peace in Sudan, the SPLA's Secretary of Information, John Luke, expressed concern over the government's negotiating tactics. "There were more southern Sudanese representing the Sudanese National Islamic Front-dominated government at the talks. People like Riek Machar and Arok Thon Arok, who didn't even directly participate in the talks, were deliberately sent by the government to sow the seeds of confusion," he said. Among the government's negotiating team were key pro-government southerners including Agnes Lukudu, the former governor of Bahr Al-Jebel, David De Chand, a Machar supporter, and Abdallah Deng Nhial, one of the country's most influential southern Sudanese Muslim politicians. Nhial, an ethnic Dinka, is a long-serving member of the National Islamic Front. The SPLA delegation was headed by the movement's vice-president, Salva Kiir.

Commenting on this most recent attempt to kick start the peace process in Sudan, Abdun Agau, the Cairo representative of the Union of Sudan African Parties (USAP) told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "There is no chance of a fundamental breakthrough. The government did not go to Nairobi prepared to compromise. They made no concessions on the stickiest issues — the separation of religion and the state and the principle of self-determination for southern Sudan." The USAP is headed by the Uganda-based Eliaba James Sorour, a distinguished southern Sudanese politician from Yei, Equatoria Province. "The USAP pursues the same objectives as the SPLA but our means of realising these objectives are different," Agau said. "We do not espouse the armed struggle," he added.

The US trade embargo against Sudan is seen by observers in the region as evidence that the US is pursuing a policy of linking trade and aid concerns to human rights issues. The Sudanese government's persecution of the country's southern Christian population has been a matter of concern in the US for a number of years. Nevertheless, few believe that the US sanctions will significantly affect Sudan. Only 3.6 per cent of Sudanese imports come from the US, with total trade between the two countries accounting for a mere $70 million per year. Observers predict the effect of the US sanctions will be only psychological. American businesses currently operating in Sudan have 30 days to pack their bags.

The US executive order does permit exemptions from the trade embargo, however officials have indicated that such exemptions will be difficult to obtain. Amongst those so far exempted from the embargo are US gum arabic importers. Sudan supplies 98 per cent of the US's gum arabic needs. Most of this is used by the food processing and cosmetic industries. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, however, has warned that no exemptions will be given to the numerous US petroleum companies clamouring to exploit Sudan's rich and virtually untapped fossil fuel deposits.

According to a statement issued by the US State Department, the immediate reason for America's decision to impose the embargo is Sudan's "continued sponsorship of international terror, its efforts to destabilise neighbouring countries, and its abysmal record on human rights."

Many observers in the region, however, believe that the embargo has been timed to strengthen the bargaining position of the SPLA at the Nairobi talks.

Deregulation at a unique price

Tthe kidnapping of foreigners in Yemen will continue as long as the government fails to meet the needs of tribes

Economic reform and structural adjustment programmes (ERSAPs) have been known to trigger many forms of social strife — none as unique as in Yemen, writes **Maye Ostowani**. Despite the concerted efforts of the government in Sana'a, impoverished tribes, suffering the effects of government subsidy cuts, have hit on a novel way of forcing government concessions — the kidnapping of foreigners and holding them to ransom. Over the past month alone, six foreigners were kidnapped by tribesmen. According to Abdul-Aziz Al-Saqqaf, editor of the English daily *Yemen Times*, there have been over 100 cases of foreigners kidnapped by tribesmen since 1993.

The hostages, Al-Saqqaf said, are used by Yemeni tribesmen as bargaining chips to try and win concessions from the government in Sana'a. "The government does not listen to them and their needs," he said.

Since the beginning of this year, an all time high of 30 foreigners were kidnapped in Yemen. "The tribes have a sense of being able to get away with it," explained Al-Saqqaf.

The latest abductions included American Steve Carpenter, four Russians, and Briton Henry Thompson. They were the victims of three different Yemeni tribes.

Carpenter was kidnapped on 30 October just hours after other tribesmen had released Thompson, a 38-year-old Briton, who was held for two weeks in the mountains of northern Yemen.

In exchange for releasing Carpenter, the tribesmen have demanded that the Yemeni government restore subsidies to their tribe. These demands come after the Yemeni government last July cut off subsidies of about 2,000 riyals ($20) per month for 200 Bakeel tribesmen.

Under International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank supervision, the Yemeni government has been implementing an economic reform and structural adjustment programme, which includes the cutting of money subsidies the government has traditionally distributed among the tribes. This year, the government cut subsidies to tribes by two thirds, handing out 500 million Yemeni riyals ($5 million), compared to last year's total of 1.5 billion riyals. These measures are a condition the Yemeni government must fulfil in order to receive international aid.

Meanwhile, negotiations between the Yemeni government and the Al-Hadda tribe for the release of four Russians abducted on 22 October ended last Monday when they were freed unharmed. No details were given of the negotiations.

The two Russian doctors and their wives were kidnapped in the Zamar region south of Sana'a by armed Al-Hadda tribesmen, angry at what they believe to be lenient sentences handed down against four men convicted of raping a teenage member of their tribe. Only one of the four men has been sentenced to death. The kidnappers have demanded that all four be executed.

The Yemeni government, for its part, is convinced that the rising number of abductions in Yemen of late is the responsibility of an "outside force" determined to tarnish Yemen's image in the world. Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdul-Karim Al-Eryani was quoted recently as saying that the kidnappings were "a political act, not a breakdown of law and order."

Ihsan Bakr, a senior journalist at *Al-Ahram*, who returned from Yemen recently, told the *Weekly* that the Yemeni government believes that an "outside force is behind the kidnappings." Yemeni officials refuse to name the country in question, but they also charge "separatists" of being involved, in reference to the leaders in exile of the Yemeni Socialist Party, formerly the ruling party in South Yemen, and later a partner in the governing coalition in united Yemen.

Hassan Abu Taleb, an Arab affairs expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, while conceding that both external and domestic political forces may be involved "to some extent", insists that the main reason behind the kidnappings phenomenon is the rising sentiment of dissatisfaction among the tribes. "The [Yemeni] government is not paying enough attention to the needs of the tribesmen," Abu Taleb said.

Yemen is a country rich in archaeological sites which attract thousands of tourists every year, mainly from Europe. About 75,000 tourists visited Yemen in 1996 generating some $50 million in revenues.

All the foreign hostages seized by Yemeni tribesmen have been released unharmed. In fact, it seems that the tribesmen often treat their hostages as guests, according to released hostages. They take their clothes to the cleaners, allow them to make telephone calls to their families, and they even give them gifts upon their release. Nevertheless, with the recent spate of kidnappings the tourist industry in Yemen is predicted to take a hard fall.

In September, Yemen said it would tighten security for tourists in an attempt to prevent kidnappings. According to Abu Taleb, however, these measures will not be enough to save the tourist industry. "There has already been a 20 to 25 per cent drop in the number of foreign tourists and organised tour groups to Yemen," he said. "And I expect that it will get worse."

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

America jingoistic, Asia jittery

From jingoism to calm counsel, America's political undercurrents wash over Asia's financial crisis, writes Gamal Nkrumah

What could possibly be politically incendiary about a recently-released International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) report revealing that Southeast Asia is now the world's second largest arms market? Not a thing, surely, if you believe that the explanation for Southeast Asia's hunger for ever-more sophisticated weapons lies in the predictable working out of an industrial logic.

"The defence market is no different from any other product market, subject to the pressures of globalisation and inter-dependency," explains IISS defence economist Digby Waller. He adds that Southeast Asian countries are developing their own defence industries and therefore the arms trade can be expected to escalate in the region. Southeast Asia and the West have become inextricably intertwined precisely because, as the former embark on building their own fledgling arsenals, they must turn to the latter's more sophisticated arms markets to supply them with everything from spare parts, to new defense systems and state-of-the-art military technologies.

What is somewhat puzzling, however, is the timing of the release of the IISS report: just when the world's attention is focussed on the financial crisis sweeping across the region. The reason most widely cited for Southeast Asia's current quandary is, of course, bad loans. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed and Indonesia's President Suharto have urged the creation of an "Asian Fund" to ease the region's currency crisis. The United States has voiced its opposition, in several strongly worded statements by officials, to International Monetary Fund involvement in such a scheme. Instead it has urged the IMF to stand firm by its decision not to help the worst affected countries, such as Indonesia, without stringent conditions being attached to such assistance.

Some 18 per cent of US exports goes to Southeast Asia. The respective figures for the European Union and Japan are 7 and 44 per cent. It is Japan, Asia's economic powerhouse, that is most likely to be hardest hit by the Southeast Asian crisis, and not America.

But American labour unions, backed by Congress, are calling for a tougher stand towards Asia. This week, jingoism aborted US President Bill Clinton's attempt to muster enough votes to approve so-called "fast-track" or extended presidential authority to negotiate trade deals. George Becker, the president of the United Steelworkers of America, spelt it out: "If we are to grant fast-track authority to the president we must include language that also assures American workers the same guaranteed rights negotiated into future trade agreements as those protections currently granted to investors and corporations."

Southeast Asian manufacturers — or more importantly, exporters — have become super-competitive over the last few weeks, due to across the board devaluations of Southeast Asian currencies.

The US Treasury and Congress were both loathe to contribute to the Thai rescue package. Why should they bail out a nation which overdoses on dodgy property loans? After all, it was excessive debt and spiralling current account deficits that triggered the crisis in Thailand, before it spread rapidly to other Southeast Asian countries. But underlying this moralistic reluctance to come to the rescue is the fear of willingly rejuvenating Southeast's export-driven growth.

The irony is that the more speculators dump local Southeast Asian currencies for the American dollar, the more competitive Southeast Asian economies will become and the cheaper its exports. Southeast Asia's three-month long financial pummelling is prompting investors to believe that slackening productivity growth in the region is finally picking up. It looks increasingly like a question of heads, Southeast Asia wins, and tails, America loses.

But at the same time, these things have to be put in their proper perspective. Developing Southeast Asia accounts for only 7.3 per cent of world output and 4.4 per cent of world trade in goods and services. Thailand's economy is smaller than California's. The emerging markets of Thailand and other Southeast Asian nations are grappling with capital account liberalisation. In the past decade or two, Southeast Asia has been attracting foreign capital — mainly short-term capital inflows, which are vulnerable to sudden reversals. Following Thailand's financial crisis and the Hang Seng's crash, borrowing facilities were withdrawn throughout the region, money supply tightened and currency depreciation swept all before it. The spate of speculative attacks that followed revealed how quickly emerging bond markets can dry up in a crisis, even in Hong Kong where banks are well regulated and well capitalised. Many, possibly most of the region's non-performing loans will simply have to be written off.

Meanwhile, it was a wise word of advice from America's most powerful financial guru that calmed down speculative attacks in Southeast Asia and helped contain the situation somewhat. "Provided the decline in financial markets does not cumulate, it is quite conceivable that we will look back at this episode as a salutary event in terms of its implications for the macroeconomy," said Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank. Greenspan came under fire from different quarters — mainly Western — for his optimism verging on nonchalance. But by then the phrase was out, and it seems to have worked.

The Southeast Asian crisis was a grim reminder of Black Monday 1987. Exactly 10 years to the week of Wall Street's last big crash, Hong Kong's Hang Seng index nose-dived. Ripple effects in the region and beyond took their toll on many an emerging market. As Western investors began to pull out, the region's stock prices took plunge after plunge.

But finance, if not physics, teaches us, that what goes down must come up. It did not take long after the 1987 crash for the American economy to take off again. New York's Dow Jones and London's FTSE were hardest hit, but within a couple of years they had risen to new record highs. Today, the American economy is healthier than ever. Unemployment in the US fell to its lowest rate in a quarter of a century, and America's financial standing is unrivalled. However, fears that the US economy is too strong and that ultimately an over-priced dollar will undermine the competitivity of American products, lurk beneath the surface. Once again, Asia poses a challenge: as Asian currencies depreciate across the board, so Asian products find themselves more attractively priced.

Other theories of a "salutary event" abound. "Just as the crash of 1987 neutralised the inflationary pressures that were building up, the crash of 1997 will dampen the unsustainable impetus of growth in labour demand," the British-based weekly, *The Economist* recently predicted.

But dampening the impetus of growth in labour demand has not just economic, but also political implications. It may even lead to the erosion of whatever popular support still remains for free market economic policies. Political tensions — ethnic and racial strife, labour unrest, military interventions — could then explode at any moment. South Korea and Thailand, the two countries worst affected by the financial crisis, have also witnessed the worst political turbulence over the past months.

It is clear from the IISS report that the Southeast Asian arms build-up is, so far at least, mainly for external protection rather than internal repression. This is in marked contrast to South Asia, where comparative figures indicate that defence expenditure is largely geared toward internal security purposes. But Southeast Asia's own internal security costs are already substantial, and hint at restlessness among the political and military establishments.

The report implicitly suggests that China is the main source of anxiety as far as most Southeast Asian nations are concerned. China is also the excuse the West gives for strengthening military ties with the region. Yet the main and most immediate cause of consternation in Southeast Asia today is not China — it is the US Congress. Asia's leaders are worried whether or not the US Congress will reject President Bill Clinton's request for fast-track trading authority in order to negotiate new and freer trade agreements with Asian nations. If America introduces stringent protectionist policies, the Asian miracle might turn out to be a mirage. Congress is posing as the champion of American workers' rights and American labour unions strongly believe that freer trade and global competition will inevitably lead to wage cuts and job losses. This week, congress called off a vote on the fast track issue. So far, America — labour unions, corporations and investors, and politicians — is sticking to its guns.

It was US Chamber of Commerce President Thomas Donohue who put it in a nutshell: "What's at stake is America's prestige and influence in the world and our ability to sustain the prosperity we are enjoying today."



Royal visit

Next week's visit to Egypt by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands promises to strengthen ties between the two nations, writes Inas Nour from Amsterdam

Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and her husband, Prince Klaus, will pay an official visit to Egypt between 17-19 November. The royal couple have been invited by President Hosni Mubarak. Queen Beatrix last visited Egypt in 1976 when she was crown princess. This is her first visit to Egypt as queen.

The president and Mrs Mubarak will hold informal talks with Queen Beatrix and Prince Klaus, before they tour the various historic Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic sites in Cairo.

In recent decades, the Netherlands has shown a strong interest in the affairs of the Middle East. It has been a strong supporter of a just settlement for the Palestinian question and an outspoken critic of the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories. In her speech at the opening of the Dutch Parliament earlier this year, Queen Beatrix stated that a just settlement to the Middle East conflict must include the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination. She also made it clear that the Netherlands stood firmly against terrorism and violence in all its forms. She stressed that all parties in the Middle East conflict should respect international law and adhere to the spirit of the Oslo Agreement.

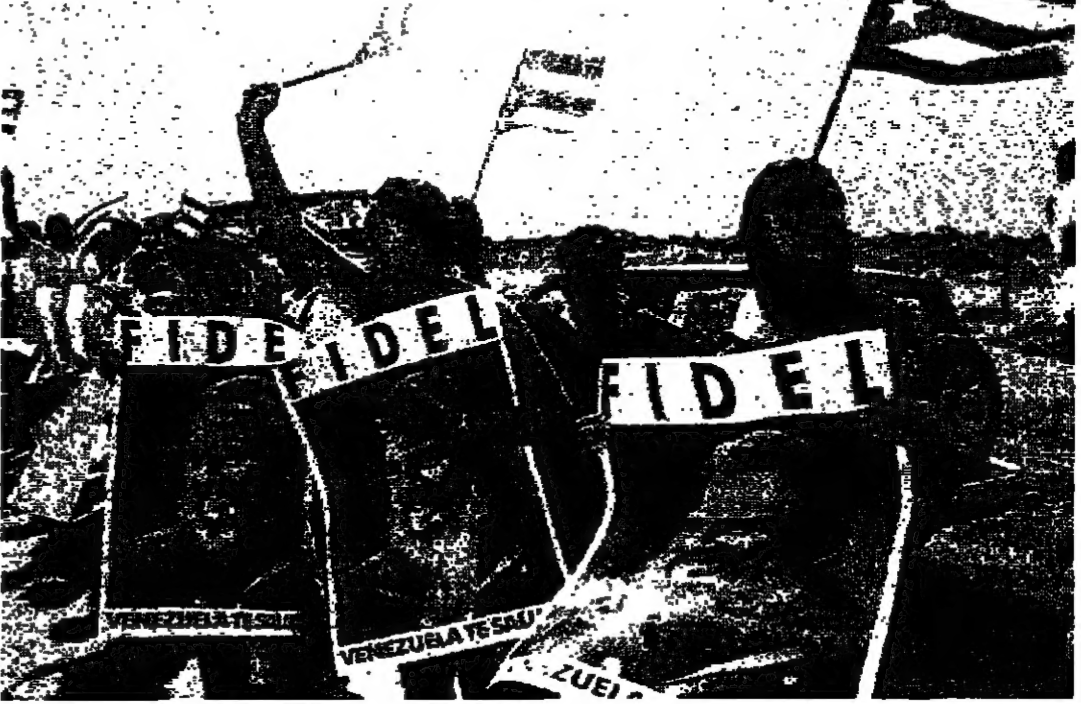
The Netherlands, traditionally a champion of human rights, is now lobbying strongly for the establishment of an international war crimes tribunal at The Hague, the Dutch capital. It is proposed that this tribunal should try those convicted of crimes committed during the war in the former Yugoslavia. The Hague is also the seat of the International Court of Justice.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and his Dutch counterpart Hans Van Mierlo, who is also due to arrive in Cairo, will meet to discuss bilateral relations. The Egyptian Ambassador to the Netherlands, Ibrahim Badawi El-Sheikh, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "the visit of Queen Beatrix to Egypt indicates that the Netherlands is keen on European-Mediterranean cooperation and that The Hague is eager to strengthen ties with Egypt and the Arab world."

Bilateral trade between Egypt and the Netherlands stood at $1.7 billion in 1996. This represents a 72 per cent increase on the 1995 figure.

World slams US embargo against Cuba

Yet again the UN General Assembly has delivered a telling blow to the US over its relentless siege of Cuba, writes Faiza Rady



Venezuelan teenage admirers of Cuban President Fidel Castro wave Cuban flags and hold posters of the charismatic Cuban leader in the Venezuelan island resort of Marguerita where leaders from Spain, Portugal and Latin American countries gathered for the Ibero-American summit (photo: Reuters)

For the sixth year in a row, the UN General Assembly issued a non-binding resolution strongly condemning the 35-year-old US trade embargo against Cuba. Since 1992, the General Assembly has regularly denounced "the promulgation and application by member states of laws and regulations whose extra-territorial effects affect the sovereignty of other states and the legitimate interest of entities or persons under their jurisdiction and the freedom of trade and navigation." It called upon all countries "to refrain from promulgating such laws."

"The US suffered its annual UN roasting last Wednesday," said Reuters. The vote on the Cuban-sponsored resolution resulted in 143 countries in favour and three opposing the resolution — the US, Israel and Uzbekistan — with 17 abstentions.

As in the past, most US allies voted against the embargo. "Not only did the number of votes in favour of the resolution increase, but we were happy to see that they crossed all geographical and economic lines," said Ricardo Alarcon, speaker of Cuba's National Assembly. Japan, which had in previous years been one of the countries to abstain, has since changed its position and voted against the embargo. Like other major US trade partners, Japan is particularly disturbed by the latest addendum to the embargo — the controversial 1996 Helms-Burton Act — that aims to sue foreign companies investing in property confiscated from American companies or individuals after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Latin American countries are among the most virulent opponents of Helms-Burton. "During the Ibero-American summit which convened in Cochabamba, Bolivia last year, delegates spent most of their time agreeing on a common stance condemning Helms-Burton," wrote Maurice Lemoine in the French monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*. In similar spirit, the South American regional organisation, the Rio Group, strongly rejected Helms-Burton, saying that "the law's implementation means extraterritorial application of domestic law, which is in conflict with international law," reported the US-based Cuban Solidarity Network.

Despite their political differences, Latin Americans remember only too vividly past US interventions and/or sanctions in the region — such as the invasion of the Dominican Republic (1961), the destabilisation of Allende's Chile (1973), the economic blockade of Nicaragua under the Sandanistas (1980s), the invasions of Granada (1983) and Panama (1989). Consequently, Latin American countries have taken a strong stand in support of Cuba, denouncing the US which — in the words of Cuban leader Fidel Castro — "passes extraterritorial legislation, applies criminal blockades, has repeatedly invaded countries in the region, and constantly intervenes in the internal affairs of others."

In an impassioned speech at the UN, Cuba's Ricardo Alarcon condemned the trade war the US government wages against Cuba and other Southern nations. "While US arbitrariness... reaches its greatest intensity against Cuba", he said, "Washington also imposed 61 economic sanctions against 35 countries between 1993 and 1996. No one shall despoil us of our properties or our rights... Cuba is not and shall never be a colonial possession of the United States," Alarcon said. More than 20 speakers denounced the US embargo and specifically Helms-Burton, which Britain said, "contains unacceptable provisions extending the powers of US courts over the activities of non-American companies outside the USA." Only American ambassador Victor Marrero opposed the resolution, saying that Washington's "overarching policy goal with regard to Cuba has remained clear: the promotion of democratic transition on the island." He failed to mention that this "democratic transition", may not, according to the text of Helms-Burton, include Fidel Castro — who, incidentally, survived at least eight CIA-engineered assassination attempts between 1960 and 1965. Deriding the US government's attempts to effect its own version of "democratic transitions", prominent linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky said that "Washington holds the world record for attempts to assassinate foreign leaders, including Castro."

Buoyed by Cuba's victory at the UN and the increasing isolation of the US, an exuberant Alarcon predicted that the embargo would eventually succumb to its own contradictions and internal American business pressures. In effect, even multimillionaire David Rockefeller recently joined the chorus of US business people speaking out against the embargo. The Cuban weekly *Granma* reported that Rockefeller said he "felt a sense of horror" when President Bill Clinton signed Helms-Burton, a piece of legislation which Rockefeller regards as totally unjustified. During a seminar at the University of Toronto, Rockefeller pointed out that the US president signed the legislation at the very time when Washington was entering the World Trade Organisation (WTO). "This is an obvious contradiction," explained Rockefeller, "given that the WTO promotes the liberalisation of international trade and opposes any obstacles to this process."

The universally condemned embargo has caused "unnecessary suffering and deaths," said Peter Bourne, from the Cuban Solidarity Network. Currently, the average Cuban has access to only two-thirds of the 1,297 types of medicine available in 1991, because the embargo was tightened to include a ban on American subsidiary trade in 1992. According to Cuban government sources, the state was forced to cut 75 per cent of its imports and reduce food subsidies by 60 per cent since 1990. Infant formula and powdered milk imports now only partially cover children's needs up to the age of seven, and about half of the six to 12-year olds are anaemic. Cuban health personnel report an increase in some infectious diseases, in iron-deficiency anaemia among pregnant women and a rise in the incidence of low-birth-weight babies, changes that the Cuban Ministry of Health attributes to problems in food supply imports. After Cuba was forced to buy its pharmaceuticals from Europe, the price of medication increased between 30 per cent and 40 per cent due to added shipping costs. Over the years, the overall increment in transport costs alone were valued at $2,510 million.

Overall, deaths caused by water-carried diseases have doubled since 1989. Denied essential US-made spare parts and lacking the means to reconvert the system, Cuba has been unable to provide all its people with sufficient potable water — a basic human right which the embargo denies the Cuban people. Commenting on the American government's relentless assaults on the island, Chomsky said: "Cuba has been subjected to US terror and economic warfare from shortly after Castro took power in 1959."

Facing up to AIDS in Asia

Poverty, ignorance and inadequate government action are the main causes of the spread of AIDS in Asia. Heba Samir reviews the results of a world conference on the deadly disease

Last week, the fourth International Congress on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in Asia and the Pacific was held in the Philippines capital, Manila. About 2,500 delegates from 65 countries attended the conference, whose task was to review global cooperation initiatives in combating the further spread of AIDS.

At the end of the five-day conference, the delegates issued a document — the "Manila Manifesto" — urging the establishment of a "sustainable regional network of exchange and collaboration" on the deadly disease. The document also stresses that "increased allocation of funds in national and local budgets" for AIDS programmes is essential for combating the spread of the disease.

At the closing ceremony of the conference, Roy Chan, president of the AIDS Society for Asia and the Pacific, noted the special role that non-government organisations had played in responding to the AIDS crisis. He warned, however, that continued financial and management support of these organisations was required if they were to continue playing a part in the control of the disease. The rate of HIV infection in Asia has doubled in the past three years, with cases now numbering between five and seven million. This figure is expected to double by the end of the century. There are now significantly more cases of infection in Asia than in Africa. An Asian Development Bank official told the conference that the spread of AIDS threatens the economic growth of Asia and the Pacific. "The AIDS epidemic is the enemy of Asian promise," ADB Vice-President Peter Sullivan said.

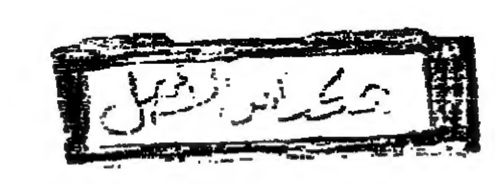
Sullivan said that prostitution and intravenous drug abuse are the most common means by which the disease is spread in Asia. The problem, he said, is "exacerbated by a combination of ignorance, official complacency or denial, limited funds and cultural taboos." Asian civil rights groups at the conference warned that governments around the world must crack down on the trafficking of women for prostitution in order to check the rapid spread of the AIDS epidemic in Asia. Sullivan also warned that while individual countries had their own anti-AIDS programmes, "regional or multi-national approaches are almost non-existent in Asia."

Among those Asian countries hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic are India — which, with a staggering five million cases of HIV infection, is the world's most badly affected country — and Cambodia. Despite the possibility that there may be more AIDS-infected people in the Asia-Pacific region than in any other part of the world, UNESCO International Bioethics Committee member Michael Kirby told the conference that the region was dealing with the problem "pretty poorly."

Because the high cost of treating AIDS cases is beyond the reach of many Asian countries, preventative measures must be the primary focus of national and multi-national AIDS control strategies, experts told the conference. Moreover, economists warned that the financial cost of the epidemic could be even higher in the future since it hits young adults at the most productive period in their lives.

The medical treatment of HIV and AIDS sufferers was also discussed at the conference. The use of placebos in the management of the disease in the developing world was the focus of intense discussion. However, researchers have since abandoned plans to introduce this technique following a study conducted in the US. The study, financed by the National Institute of Health, was designed to compare the effectiveness of the "anti-AIDS" drug, AZT, with that of a placebo in reducing the chances of transmission of HIV from pregnant women to their babies. The study was concluded in 1994 after it was proven that AZT significantly reduced the chances of the virus being transmitted. Despite this, the drug's high cost makes it prohibitive for many women in developing countries.

Around six million people worldwide have so far died of AIDS. More than 20 million more now carry the AIDS-causing virus. Summing up the mood of the conference, one participant said, "There are too many conferences, too many words and not nearly enough action."



Judge's day in Pakistan

Sparks were flying as Pakistan's chief justice and prime minister slugged it out. Democracy is at stake, writes **Eqbal Ahmad**

Even by Pakistan's high standards of political drama, this was a show of shows. The First Act on 12 August was low key. By the end of September, into Act 4, it was a cliff-hanger. The main protagonists — prime minister and chief justice — gave riveting performances before an audience of 130 million Pakistanis. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Sajjad Ali Shah, chief justice of Pakistan, locked horns, eyeball-to-eyeball, and kept the country on the edge. A momentous issue — the separation of powers — was at stake. At last, in the evening of 31 October, Sharif pulled back from the brink, averting a constitutional collapse. The final outcome may prove to be of lasting significance to Pakistan, a Third World equivalent of Madison vs. Miranda.

Since the country's founding, Pakistan's senior judges have played defining roles, both negative and positive, in its political development. The judiciary has enjoyed a measure of legitimacy. As such it has served as an instrument of legitimating power, and occasionally as a recourse against the executive. All heads of government have harassed, manipulated, and attempted to tame the judiciary with more or less success and, occasionally, no *success at all*. And all had to endure a confrontation with one court, one judge or, as in the case of General Mohammed Ziaul Haq, a host of them.

The last great executive-judiciary clash occurred in 1996. It pitted Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto against Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah. As leader of the opposition, Nawaz Sharif had appointed many new judges to various high courts. A number of these appointments were made without consulting either the chief justices of the provincial high courts or the chief justice of Pakistan. A provincial lawyer challenged these appointments as unconstitutional. His plaint reached the Supreme Court. As Justice Sajjad Ali Shah was himself an appointee of Ms Bhutto she expected him to dismiss the petition summarily, and was chagrined when he did not. As the hearings began and the government's case appeared in trouble, the chief justice and his family were harassed by Bhutto's agents, a crude tactic which generated much public criticism.

In what is now known as the Judges' Case, the court ruled Bhutto's appointment of 15 judges to be illegal, ordered their withdrawal from the bench, and laid down strict rules for future appointments. As Benazir Bhutto tried to evade the ruling, she was increasingly isolated, and finally obeyed the judge's order. When the president dismissed her government in October 1996, he gave her delay in complying with the court's order as one reason for dissolving her government. In the Judges' Case, the Supreme Court's judgement had finally rid the country of years of "practice" established by nearly three decades of authoritarian rule. It required that superior court judges be appointed on the recommendation of the chief justice of Pakistan or the chiefs of the provincial high courts. If the chief executive has any objection to a candidate, he must state his reasons in writing. Soon after he replaced Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif's pro-judiciary stance as leader of opposition was put to the test.

On 12 August 1997 the chief justice of Pakistan recommended to the prime minister five senior high court judges for elevation to the Supreme Court. Two of these had ruled against Nawaz Sharif in prior cases, and the prime minister viewed them as hostile to him. Furthermore, with his overwhelming parliamentary majority, Sharif had passed two constitutional amendments and enacted an Anti-Terrorism Law, the constitutionality of which was being challenged. He wished a friendly court to uphold his legislation. So he temporised offering to appoint three judges instead of five. The chief justice stood his ground insisting that the prime minister either honour his recommendation or state his objection in writing, a demand he could not meet.

Then, the prime minister upped the ante. He had the president of Pakistan — analogue of the crown in Britain — sign an ordinance limiting the Supreme Court to its present strength — 12 judges — thus making redundant the chief justice's recommendation for filling the five vacancies. The prime minister again underestimated the chief justice who ruled the ordinance unconstitutional. The battle lines were drawn and the country was forced to take sides. The cabinet and the ruling party legislators supported the prime minister. The bar associations and the press stood nearly on hundred per cent for the separation of powers which meant, in this instance, taking the chief justice's side. And the opposition, all behind the chief justice, began to file almost daily a range of references and suits against the prime minister.

High drama ensued as moves and counter-moves were made. The Supreme Court itself became divided with six of its eleven judges dissociating themselves from the chief justice, and transferring them to the provinces. The president was deeply involved. Even the chief of army staff entered the fray as mediator, and fear of yet another military take-over engulfed the country. On 31 October, the prime minister called an emergency meeting of the National Assembly, proposing to pass a law limiting the Supreme Court to 12 judges. The chief justice scheduled for the same day a hearing on a public petition against the 14th amendment enacted by Nawaz Sharif to prevent parliament members from changing their loyalties. It was a rapid fire day.

The war ended swiftly. The chief justice struck first. At 10am while the parliament was assembling, he gave a stay order against the 14th amendment: it is not law until the court gives its final verdict. The chief justice had used a trump. *If the parliament legislated the* number of judges, he might hear another petition, annul the 13th amendment, and restore the president's power to dissolve the parliament, hence the government. The president, whom Nawaz Sharif had stripped of all but ceremonial functions, would have good reason to dissolve a government caught in constitutional deadlock.

The parliamentary session was short. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif spoke of the achievements of his government, the crucial tasks ahead, the obstructions put in his way. Then, quite abruptly, he concluded that he was appointing forthwith the five judges recommended by the chief justice of Pakistan. He hoped, as did all Pakistanis, that a nightmare had ended. If the war between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah does not resume, Pakistan has gained enormously from this conflict. Unfortunately, indications are that it may resume. The chief justice has now summoned the prime minister and some of his party colleagues on contempt of court charges.

New Labour, nouvelle cuisine?

Tony Blair had Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin round to his place in London last week for foie gras and pumpkin soup. The French got a sofa to take home, the British got a seat on the board of the European Central Bank. **Peter Snowdon** watches the big boys play musical chairs

Last Thursday evening, President Jacques Chirac of France and his Prime Minister Lionel Jospin arrived in London with a retinue of four cabinet ministers for the 20th Anglo-French Summit — or "*sommet franco-britannique*", if you prefer. In Paris, *Le Monde* printed an exclusive interview with Tony Blair which filled almost the whole of the inside front page. In London, *The Independent* published a full-colour picture of the sofas the guests would sit on. After they had left again on Friday night, *Libération* ran three pages of analysis and comment on the state of one of the European Union's most important bilateral relations. *The Guardian*, meanwhile, published a short column largely devoted to a vitriolic attack by one of Britain's leading "TV chefs" on the menu served at the final lunch — not on any gastronomic grounds, but for the (obvious) reason that it was insufficiently "English".

One might deduce from this that the French take their politics more seriously than the British do. It is rumoured that Chirac was so impressed by Thursday night's pigeon that he asked "*mon ami Tony*" for the phone number of the caterers. But otherwise it seems to have been a case of Gallic substance competing for attention with British style. In other words, not a very edifying spectacle.

Britain tried to go back on the spirit, if not the word, of July's agreement to extend the Eurotunnel concession, by demanding a bigger *share of the operating profits (assuming that one day there is such a thing)*. The answer was "*Non*". France magnanimously offered Britain a seat on the board of the European Central Bank if/when the United Kingdom joins the single currency. Britain agreed in return to do everything it could to ensure that the final arrangements for EMU proceed smoothly during the UK's stint at the helm of the EU beginning in January — reassuring words in the week France embarked on a campaign to sabotage the nominations for the presidency of the ECB by announcing it would be putting forward its own candidate, Jean-Claude Trichet, currently governor of the Banque de France.

Jospin promised all outstanding claims for compensation from British drivers stranded in France during the 1996 truckers' strike would be settled within three months, as this year's truckers' strike ground to a halting close with unions divided and employers having promised precious little. As for Iraq, the two Security Council members agreed to agree in public that the UN resolutions should be respected, and disagree in private over the means by which respect should be sought — Britain favouring more stick, and France more carrot.

Bigger differences loomed in the background. Although Tony Blair's aides praised the French president for being "on message" (i.e. he liked the sofas — he and Lionel got one each to take home), they kept quiet about the preparations for a much more important summit that is scheduled to take place on 21 November. The Luxembourg employment summit was granted as a concession to the French socialists, in return for their agreeing to sign up to the budgetary stability pact finalised in Amsterdam. Most of the other member states have already made it clear that they do not intend to allow anything of substance to emerge from these talks. The Belgian prime minister, Jean-Luc Dehaene, was only the first to stipulate that the purpose of the summit was, precisely, to "talk" about employment — not to do anything to provide it. Germany and Spain have since made it plain they are absolutely opposed to any attempt to obstruct further liberalisation of the European labour market.

It is in this context that France has begun to look to the British Labour Party as an ally. However, although both France and Britain have agreed to support the employment directives recently put forward by the EU Commission, they are far from agreeing on what the real implications of implementing these directives would be. Both the leftist Jospin and the rightist Chirac see them as an opportunity to reassert their right to government intervention — the former out of socialist conviction, the latter through a combination of *dirigiste* instinct and blatant opportunism. But neither of these approaches sits easily with Tony Blair's "Thatcherism with a human face". Blair and his Chancellor Gordon Brown took advantage of last week's meeting to try and soften up the French in preparation for the inevitable climb down at Luxembourg. Sensing that "flexibility" was too loaded (or too honest) a word, Blair told *Le Monde* that the key to the economic future of Europe was "employability". Chirac, asked whether he agreed with the British prime minister, retorted that he could not agree with him, since he did not know what "employability" meant.

Reading Blair's interview, you have to admit that Chirac has a point. As social policy recedes ever further behind the electoral horizon, the British prime minister seems more and more determined simply to will his country into a state of *flourishing retro-modernity*, symbolised by the showcase of young British design hurriedly installed on the 38th floor of Canary Wharf to welcome last week's visitors — a discreetly retail paradise, staffed by a dynamic, "adaptable" labour force, where yuppie restaurants, hand-made rugs and "light sculptures" go hand-in-hand with moral responsibility and good old-fashioned family values. At the same time, his European vision sounds increasingly like the instant nostalgia of a man just back from his Tuscan timeshare. "I like Europe, I feel at home there," he told his French interviewers, as if somehow that assurance contained the answer to all their questions. "The days of mass production are over," he added, something which would surely be news to most of the French lorry drivers performing just-in-time deliveries across the continent in order to save their employers' the cost of storage space, and whose unions have just agreed to a salary package that would notionally bring their wages up to today's legal minimum level — by the year 2000.

But even if the Luxembourg summit was always destined to be still-born, given the weight of post-Maastricht "structural adjustment" under which the Union is struggling, New Labour has not yet managed to establish its own slick code as the continent's Esperanto. "Adaptability" still means different things in different languages. For some, it is the choice between Umbria and the Ariege this year; for others, the choice between under-paid part-time work in a world in which the welfare state is in retreat, and no work at all. No wonder, then, if many people (French lorry drivers included) don't "feel at home" in Europe. They actually have to live there.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Enough cowboy diplomacy

Voicing adolescent threats and rhetoric reminiscent of the Reagan era cowboy diplomacy, the United States has mounted the stage and pounded the pulpit in a bid to make clear its condemnation of Iraq's decision to bar US members of the UN inspection team.

In a Security Council meeting earlier this week, US ambassador to the UN, Bill Richardson, said he wanted to see the council pass a resolution calling for "serious consequences" if Iraq does not reverse its decision on the US inspectors.

If the council does not approve this resolution, he said, then "all bets are go, all options are on".

In a similarly self-serving move, the Security Council denied Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz the right to address the council, on the grounds, as Richardson said, that he will say nothing but lies.

The US, clearly, is willing to go into this conflict alone — laying down the law based on a self-professed sense of moral superiority and a self-mandated right to dictate policy to the rest of the world.

But what of the United Nations? Has the organisation become so emasculated that world public opinion is nonchalantly ignored whenever a member-state with the necessary military and financial weight deems it prudent?

While few would disagree that Iraq should abide by the UN decisions, even fewer believe that military options are the way to handle the crisis. Any such move is sure to result in very serious consequences.

Also on the US's agenda is banning some Iraqi officials from international travel. But would Richardson ever entertain the preposterous notion of banning Israeli officials from travelling abroad because their government had not complied with UN decisions or peace agreements?

The answer is obvious — as obvious as the US's bias in every decision it takes with regard to the Arab world.

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		Yemen	10 Riyals

Un-Thai-ing the knot

Ibrahim Nafie examines the lessons to be learned from the collapse in Asian financial markets



The recent collapse in the stock markets of Southeast Asia contains many lessons for the Egyptian economy. Indeed, President Hosni Mubarak, anticipating the need to forestall a similar catastrophe in Egypt, has moved quickly to convene a high-level committee, comprising officials and businessmen, charged with the task of investigating events that led to the collapse of Asian markets.

The Thai experience exposes the hazards involved in running large budgetary deficits in tandem with unregulated foreign investment in the financial markets, and the structural dangers of failing to ensure a balanced relationship in the growth of the visible and invisible economy. It has also underlined the importance of establishing economic partnerships between two or more nations as insurance against the vagaries of the market, while at the same time demonstrating the flexibility that the IMF can muster when faced with such crises, as long as the country in question has powerful allies.

One of the problems faced by the committee will be the imbalance between Egypt's visible and invisible earnings. While invisible earnings have steadily increased, consolidating a trade surplus, the balance of visible trade shows a chronic deficit. Last year alone the trade deficit reached US$9.5 billion, leaving the total visible deficit for the years 1990-1996 at a staggering US$53 billion.

Egypt imports and consumes far more than it exports, a situation that is made possible only by the continuing surplus in the invisible balance of trade, largely a result of the influx of hard currency from remittances abroad. Without these remittances large sums would have to be borrowed, exacerbating the foreign debt crisis which Egypt has managed to forestall throughout the current decade.

Certainly, dependency on invisible surpluses cannot continue indefinitely, and in an attempt to restore balance between the two components of the trade figures, the Supreme Council for Exports has been actively encouraging diplomatic missions abroad to explore the possibility of opening up markets to Egyptian goods.

Still more efforts, though, are necessary if gaps in the balance of trade are to be closed. Internationally, Egypt must negotiate increasingly preferential access to foreign markets, while domestically, the public sector must be encouraged to improve the quality and nature of its products, so that they are in line with international demands.

That the private sector is showing rapid growth is encouraging. Further privatisation can only enhance this growth which, in the 1980s, saw a 10 per cent increase in the private sector's contribution to the GDP.

In order to successfully penetrate new and growing markets, every aspect of Egypt's export trade, from pricing and marketing, quality and production levels, to the strategies employed to meet GATT agreements, must be reviewed. The fall in interest rates should encourage greater capital investment, and businessmen should take greater advantage of the opportunities afforded by the growth of the local stock market.

Boosting local production requires bold and creative thinking. Egypt has an enormous agricultural and mineral base. Yet to realise the potential this affords, there must be far higher levels of direct investment in Egyptian industry, aimed at consolidating the manufacturing base. Such consolidation will result not only in an increase in living standards across the board, but will act as the motor to infrastructural improvements that can be effected without borrowing from abroad.

In terms of forging international economic partnerships that might act as insurance against market fluctuations, a great deal of effort is being expended in developing agreements with the European Union, agreements that should incorporate the maximum technological transfer in order to further develop the domestic production base in light of the demands of international markets. And regionally, the Arab world continues to offer a wealth of possibilities that have yet to be fully explored.

For such possibilities to be realised however, there must not only be greater openness within the markets of individual nations, but Arab countries must work together more closely, not only in integrating their own economies but in negotiating with other trade blocks such as the EU and NAFTA.

Such cooperation is particularly important in terms of implementing GATT agreements in such a way that they operate to the benefit and not detriment of Arab economies. And in developing such levels of cooperation, between both Arab nations and with the European Union, Egypt's hand with the IMF should be strengthened in the event of any future crisis.

Identity problems of Arab-Americans

Back from attending the last annual convention of the AAUG in Washington, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** examines the identity problems now facing Arab-Americans

The invitation I received from the AAUG, the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, to take part in their annual convention in Washington last week, offered me the opportunity to learn at first hand some of the problems facing US citizens of Arab origin. Made up of university professors, post-graduate students and professionals, the AAUG represents a group of intellectuals with specific characteristics and concerns who are not immune to the vicissitudes that have characterised US-Arab relations since the breakdown of the bipolar world order and its replacement by what is seen from an American perspective as a unipolar world order under Washington's tutelage.

During the Cold War, things were quite straightforward: the United States backed Israel unequivocally, the Soviet Union backed the Arabs. Unable to endorse the clear American bias to Israel, Arab-Americans worried that they could be accused of anti-Americanism and felt that if ever they hoped to be fully integrated American citizens, they had to break out of the state of siege imposed on them, especially on those among them of Palestinian origin.

With the end of the Cold War and America's emergence as the sole superpower, not only at the global level but even with regard to regional issues, notably the Middle East crisis, a mechanism known as 'the peace process' was devised with the declared objective of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. So far, the process has not lived up to expectations, but it has placed Arab-Americans before the need to adapt to a new situation in which the frame of reference has become peace, rather than confrontation and war, between Arabs and Jews.

A confrontation that has endured for long decades, the Arab-Israeli conflict now touches a whole new generation of Arab-Americans who, though raised in the United states and steeped in American culture and values, are nevertheless frustrated by the inequity with which Arab, notably Palestinian, grievances are met. The AAUG convention cast light on how this younger generation of Arab-Americans have developed an approach of their own to the problems they face in a global and regional context that is very different from that with which the founding fathers of the movement had to deal.

To talk of Arab-Americans is to talk of citizens whose identity is subjected to the pull of two different poles, creating a tension between the sense of belonging to America on the one hand and to the Arab world on the other. Arab-Americans can neither identify totally with American society because of its clear bias towards Israel, nor with Arab societies which lack the democracy and freedom of expression to which they are accustomed. In other words, they suffer from an identity problem that needs to be addressed.

Moreover, they do not operate in a vacuum because the US is a main arena in which the fate of the Middle East, notably the Arab-Israeli conflict, is determined. The more prominent figures among them are subjected to pressures and temptations from various Arab regimes seeking their endorsement, as well as from American institutions and corporations who see them as an entrée into the Arab world. Arab-Americans can either resign themselves to being victims of the contradictory pressures exerted on them or rise above them and take advantage of democracy in America to raise the critical issues that their fellow Arabs cannot raise with an equal degree of freedom back home. At the same time, they can develop a strategy aimed at endorsing the causes of other minority groups in America, such as the Blacks, the Native Americans, the Hispanics, etc., in order to win the endorsement by these other minority groups of their own causes. Jews in the US are quite successful at such practices while Arabs have proved unable so far to conduct with any measure of success a strategy of alliances with other minority groups.

Interesting in this connection is Edward Said's keynote address to the AAUG convention in which this logic is taken to its ultimate conclusion by positing that any opening on other minority groups should include the Jewish minority in America itself. The speech, part of which was reproduced in last week's *Al-Ahram Weekly*, carried the following significant statement: "There is a link to be made between what happened to Jews in World War II and the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, but it cannot be made only rhetorically, or as an argument to demolish or diminish the true content of both the Holocaust and 1948. Neither is equal to the other; similarly, neither one nor the other excuses present violence; and finally, neither one nor the other must be minimised. There is suffering and injustice enough for everyone. But unless the connection is made by which the Jewish tragedy is seen to have led directly to the Palestinian catastrophe by, let us call it necessity (rather than pure will), we cannot coexist as two communities of detached and uncommunicatingly separate suffering". At the same time, however, Said's critical assessment of the Oslo agreements remains unchanged. He added: "It has been the failing of Oslo to plan in terms of separation, a clinical partition of peoples into individual, but unequal, entities, rather than to grasp that the only way of rising beyond the endless back-and-forth violence and dehumanisation is to admit the universality and integrity of the other's experience, and to begin to plan a common life together".

Unfortunately, Edward Said's address came at the very end of the convention and there was not enough time to debate it thoroughly. Some of his ideas may have taken the audience by surprise, but, as I see it, it is high time for Arab-Americans to adopt a more 'offensive' strategy going beyond just reacting to events. This will serve the Arab cause and help overcome whatever identity problems Arab-Americans still suffer from.

Private capital, public use

By Naguib Mahfouz

Charity is a well-known trait of the Muslim community, and an integral part of religious and secular life. The Ministry of Religious Endowments was set up and used to be considered one of the most important posts in the country. I worked in the ministry at the beginning of my career and can testify to the important human and social role played by the endowments for the needy.

When I was the secretary of Ali Abdel-Razek Pasha, then minister of religious endowments, a great estate of over 20 thousand feddans was endowed for the public benefit. The king had his eye on the revenues from this estate and asked that it be placed under his trusteeship. Abdel-Razek Pasha, reluctant to obey the king, told his majesty's delegate that the revenues of the estate had already been included in the ministry's budget for that year, and that he would have to wait for the next year. The king was enraged and issued a decree annexing the estate to the Royal Domains.

Such was his rage that, when Abdel-Razek Pasha's wife died, he refrained from sending his condolences, which was the custom with regard to all ministers. Abdel-Razek Pasha took this as a personal insult and sought to resign his post in the cabinet, but was persuaded not to by the then prime minister, Nuqrashi Pasha, who wished to avoid the fall of the whole cabinet.

This is just an example of the importance of private capital and the crucial social role it must play. While in the past, endowments were mainly created with humanitarian needs in mind, in modern society this role extends to other fields, be they scientific, cultural or educational.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — From baby milk to missiles

Al-Shaab: "The truth of the matter is that the US is out to destroy Iraq, not just Saddam. Its aim is to keep Iraq out of the strategic balance in the region in order to ensure Israeli superiority. It is out to cripple the potential of the Iraqi people and stop any development, and the result is that children will continue to die, the war against Iraq starting with baby milk and ending with long-range missiles. It can be said that the current circumstances are congenial for Iraq's return to its natural place in the confrontation with Israel. If the US embarks on another ill-conceived adventure against Iraq, the winners will be Iraq and the Arab nation."
(Talaat Romih, 7 November)

October: "What more does the US want from Iraq? It has imposed its will on it, destroyed all its weapons so that it is unable to add to Arab strength, dashed any hopes of creating military industries, undermined the morale of the Iraqis and trampled on their honour, leaving them in a state of desperation. So what more does it want? What the US is doing to Iraq, Israel is doing to the Palestinian people. And what is the meaning of US pressures on Libya and Sudan and the imposition of sanctions against them? Does the US want to do away with the Arabs so that only Israel remains in the region, armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons?"
(Editorial, 9 November)

Al-Wafd: "It was not odd that Iraq should dig its heels in over its decision (to ban US weapons inspectors) as a way of getting things moving. It was either that or enduring another hundred years of sanctions. Iraq is right in focusing the spotlight on US tyranny in using UN resolutions to undermine the spirit of the Iraqi people and dissipate their energies. And the US has no right to lie and allege that Iraq still possesses an arsenal of chemical and biological weapons — it is merely a pretext to extend sanctions against it for as long as possible. Such measures reek of the Middle Ages but this is what superpower America wants, even as we approach the 21st century."
(Sanaa El-Said, 9 November)

Al-Usbooe: "Seven full years have elapsed since the US embarked on its war of starvation against Iraq, despite all possible concessions by that country. We would have thought that with matters returning to normal in Kuwait the way would have been paved for the lifting of sanctions against Iraq. However, events have shown that the US is not satisfied with merely destroying Iraq's power, scuttling its political and economic potential and rupturing its internal unity. It now aims at destroying the Iraqi people. What else explains this pronounced hostility and US persistence in continuing the war of starvation against the Iraqi people? Iraq has finally decided to stand up to US arrogance — no ruler who sees his people dying before his eyes could do otherwise."
(Mahmoud Bakry, 10 November)

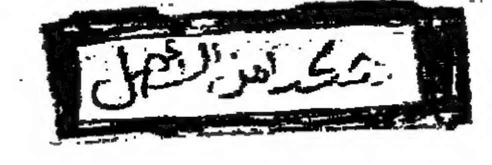
Al-Ahram: "The present crisis should not be allowed to escalate and become another Iraqi-US confrontation, with the UN serving only as a facade. There are psychological factors in the issue such as the animosity and mutual suspicion between Saddam and the US administration. The Iraqi leadership is out for revenge without having the means to carry it out and the US wants to punish by military means, something totally unacceptable to the Arab nations. We say to both sides that the interests of the downtrodden Iraqis and the upholding of international law cannot be served under such conditions."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 10 November)

Al-Arabi: "It seems that the siege clamped on Iraq, Sudan and Libya has become the way the US imposes its will, but punishment is directed at the people rather than the governments of these countries. But who said that the US should sit in judgement and punish wrong-doers? The US has shown itself to be the instigator of terrorism in the region and Israel is a glaring example of a nation defying international law. Israel has shown that the US condones and fully supports its unlawful actions."
(Galal Aref, 10 November)

Compiled by **Hala Sagr**



Egypt will not attend the conference in Doha... Public opinion and presidential will concurred when President Mubarak declared his decision not to send an Egyptian delegation to the economic meeting. I portrayed the president's resolve with clear, firm strokes of the pen, filling in solid features set in a serene expression. Strong eyebrows and nose, a broad jawline, the dense shading of the face: all these contribute to the sense of purpose. One hand raised, Mubarak could be acknowledging the popularity of his decision — or calling a halt to US pressure.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Bridging gaps

Egypt must resume the traditional position it occupied on the world stage during the years of the Non-Aligned Movement. It needs to capitalise on what remains of its standing in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

China is the most important of the countries with which we must endeavour to re-establish strong ties, but South Asia, India and Pakistan are also crucial links. Recent steps in that direction included President Mubarak's and Prime Minister El-Ganzouri's visits to Russia, preceded by trips to China and to Malaysia. These visits may easily be read as expressions of a growing awareness that the global variables of the coming century will not restrict wealth, technological and scientific progress and other factors of economic power to European or US borders.

This is not to discount the importance of relations with the West. But it is of prime importance that we diversify the sources and channels of economic, political, and scientific cooperation, and benefit from China's rich experience, particularly in view of the many similarities between two peoples who built their civilisations on agriculture, on the banks of great rivers. Furthermore, the unipolar world order, in which only one major power enjoys uncontested influence and hegemony, will not last for long. Several other poles will be emerging on the world scene.

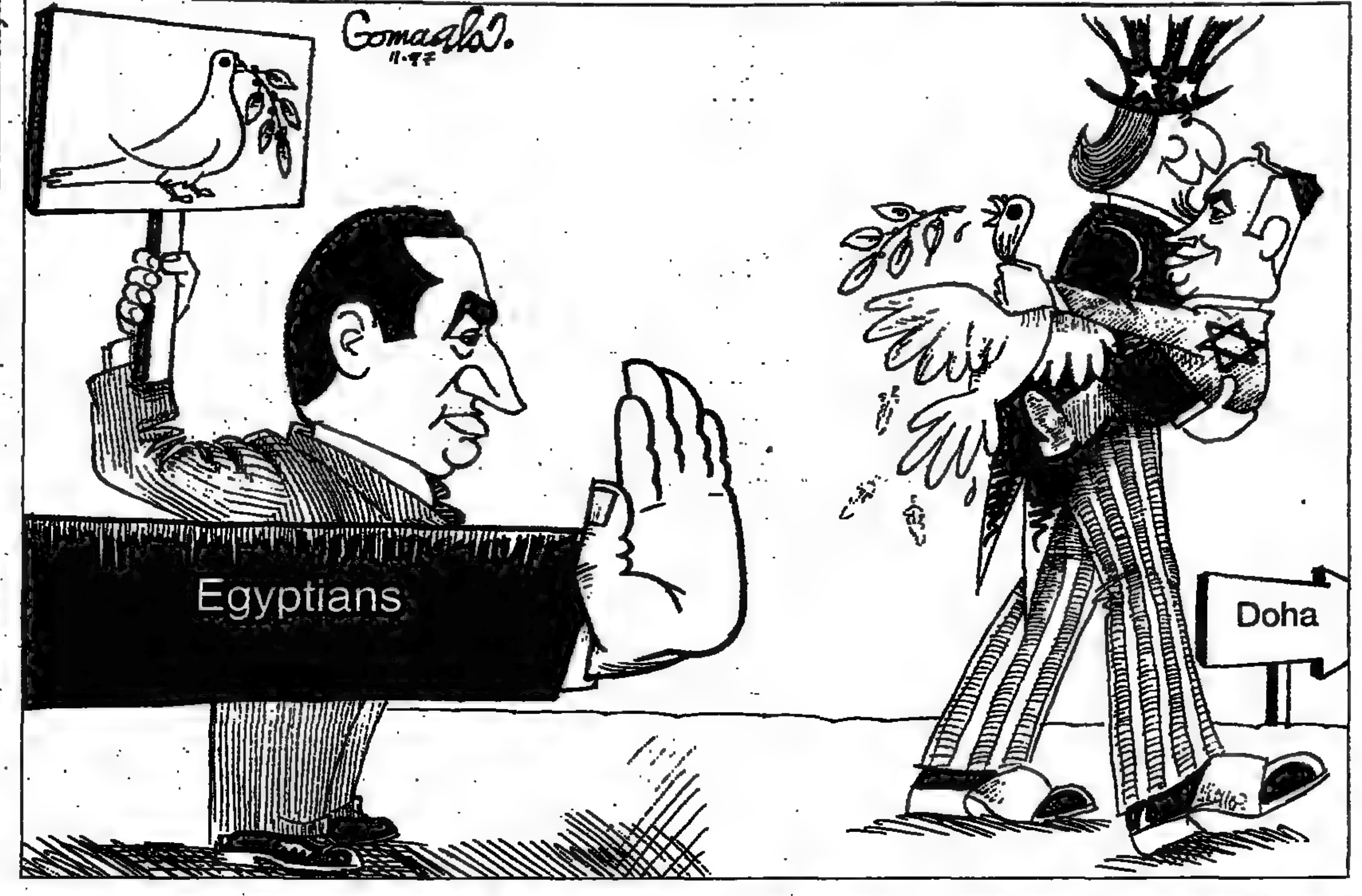
Bridging the gaps between Egypt and the Asian Tigers, *with China in the lead*, requires that the media focus on developments in those countries. It is not sufficient to concentrate on trade, economic activities and businessmen's communications. The matter requires increased concern for and interest in the cultural, scientific, and technological aspects of these civilisations as well. The Asian countries *can be rightfully proud* of their great achievements in these domains. When in China, I inquired about Sino-Egyptian cultural and scientific exchange, and learned that Egypt sends the Folkloric Art Troupe on a Chinese tour from time to time — our only contribution to a cultural dialogue that must grow richer and more intense. At the same time, the Chinese press was full of advertisements for an Israeli opera in Beijing. Despite the Arabic language courses available at most Chinese universities — I met scores of Chinese who spoke *Arabic fluently* — there is no interest in Egypt, nor in the Arab world as a whole, in studying the Chinese language, although it is of prime importance in dealing with Southeast Asian countries.

Only EgyptAir serves Tokyo via Bangkok for tourist purposes. There are no direct flights to Beijing or Shanghai. Yet before very long, China and the Asian Tigers will become important sources of tourists.

It appears that for the present, China is not yet ready to invest abroad. But it can participate in joint ventures with Egypt. The Chinese authorities with whom I spoke felt that the project of a free trade zone in Suez may become the core of a vast Sino-Egyptian economic cooperation project.

Significant changes in the Chinese market and demand structure, however, may prompt Egyptian exporters to modify the kinds of goods which they *used to* export to China. The Chinese market mechanism, which calls for a competitive edge, has confronted Egyptian production with a *real challenge*, due to the competitiveness and quality of similar Chinese goods.

It is clear that the remarkable speed at which the ASEAN countries are moving and the dynamism and vitality they generate in the fields of socio-economic development, education, technology transfer, and the application of modern methods in higher management, reflect on the image of these communities and the progress they have achieved. This should open our eyes to a model of revitalisation and advancement worthy of more careful study and follow-up.



Soapbox

Adjusting to globalism

Conferences which bring together participants from Asia, Africa and Latin America, remind Egyptians of events which took place over 40 years ago. In April 1955, President Nasser went to the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which marked the birth of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Movement. After drawing in a number of Latin American countries, the movement developed into the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. But when the three continents met once again in 1989 to form the G-15, the world had already undergone a radical change.

The change was deeply felt at the G-15 meeting held on 3 November in Kuala Lumpur. The financial crisis which had shaken stock markets in Asia, and profoundly affected Asian national currencies, loomed heavily over the meeting. This time, the crisis enhanced the participants' strongly felt need for greater solidarity.

Solidarity was not needed to defend their political independence, nor to declare their refusal to join one camp or the other. But solidarity was needed to protect their emerging economies, to warn against speculations targeting their national currencies, and to correct international trade distortions which preponderantly serve the interests of developed countries and reserve aid to the developing countries.

The movement, in other words, is a binding force to unite in adjusting to globalism by benefiting from its positive and minimising its negative consequences.

This week's Soapbox speaker is editor-in-chief of the international politics journal, Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya, *published by Al-Ahram.*

Osama El-Ghazali Harb

State violence, people's terror

Double standards and absolute power: there is such a thing as too much, writes **Hassan Hanafi**. The melting pot is boiling over

Terrorism is so widely, frequently and passionately discussed that *even the media is terrorised*. Intellectuals who do not openly oppose violence by calling for the punishment of terrorists have been subjected to harsh criticism. International conferences, in Sharm El-Sheikh or elsewhere, are convened in the victims' countries, but only issue closing statements that condemn the victims and absolve the culprits. In other words, individual terrorists are condemned, while state violence is exonerated.

Terrorism, regardless of its perpetrator, punishes the innocent for the mistakes of the criminals. It kills children, women and old people indiscriminately, shoots down airplanes, plants bombs in public parks or government buildings. Islam rules that women, children, the feeble and the elderly are exempt from fighting. War may be waged only against those capable of bearing arms in battle — able-bodied men.

Nobody reflects on how the so-called terrorists *have come to be what they are*, why they are capable of harming and killing themselves and others, of transforming themselves into human bombs that destroy their own lives as well as their enemies. They have been ripped out of context, as though one was born a terrorist. Meanwhile, society is exonerated of all responsibility for creating terrorists.

The Palestinians' land was stolen. They lost their homes, saw their parents and children beaten and humiliated, sought refuge in exile. For them, the past has been obliterated, and there is no present or future . Everything that they once *called their own is gone. Nothing remains except* the air they breathe. Suicide takes even that away. Through martyrdom and death, perhaps, the bombers hope to attain something in heaven, having lost everything on earth.

But what about the legitimate right to struggle and resist? Are the commandos in southern Lebanon, the Golan or Palestine not entitled to such rights? Why are they branded terrorists, despite occupation, expropriation, expulsion, or a life eked out in misery, in tents along the borders of their country, or under occupation? When they rise to defend themselves, to resist the occupation, and free their land, they are dubbed terrorists, while the aggressors and their occupying forces are victims. For those victims, conferences are convened, and statements issued to defend their rights.

State violence, however, does not necessarily come only from other foreign countries, such as Israel or the US. It is often exercised by the *nation-state against its own citizens. In other words,* terrorism can be either a domestic product, or one imported from abroad.

The state controls all activities on the domestic front: the economy, media, education, culture and politics. One of Naguib Mahfouz's characters says: "Do not deride the state, for it is the ultimate sovereign". It controls political parties and parliamentary procedures. Even the opposition must revolve within the state's orbit, or remain marginalised, without effect on the governing authority.

The nation-state inflicts terror on its citizens day and night, under socialist or capitalist regimes — regimes they have not chosen — in peace-time or in war, without consultation, through laws applied or abrogated at whim. Burdensome academic curricula are imposed on the nation's children; every day, we are assaulted by mass media which extoll the head of state's achievements and justify his policies, when they are not advertising extravagant consumer goods, or airing "entertaining" programmes that fail to address the general public's interests, or even touch on the universal questions of religion, sex, or power.

No freedom of expression through legitimate channels is tolerated. Political parties are prohibited except when approved by the state, which selects political representatives who represent no one, but who obstruct true representation. Any attempt to express political views is condemned as subversion, a threat to the stability of the regime, to be condemned in a court of law.

Armed terror, perpetuated by an individual or a group, may only be a reaction to the violence of the state. The spiral of violence escalates as each side condemns the other. Yet if the state were to grant the people their rights of free expression, and to allow the establishment of legitimate political parties, the violence perpetrated by individuals would eventually cease.

Whenever terrorism is mentioned in the Western media, it is always linked to the Arab region, the Middle East or Islam. The association has become so strong that the Arabs are automatically portrayed as terrorists, while Islam represents violence, and the Middle East is depicted as the main exporter of human bombs.

But what about terrorism against Arabs and Muslims? France practices terrorism against Algerians on French soil, through assassinations or jailing based on mere suspicion. This takes place in a country readily associated with individual *liberties and constitutional rights. Girls have been* prohibited from wearing the Islamic veil and dress to school in this land of freedom. Neo-Nazi parties burn down the homes and shops of Muslim Turks in Germany: is this not terrorism in the land of rationalism and enlightenment? IRA bombs and British repression, or Mafia terror campaigns, have not associated Christianity with terrorism. No reference is made in media reports to the British colonisation of Northern Ireland, or the dominance of one sect over the other.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was ethnically cleansed in a brutal war. Women, children, and old people, all of them citizens of a member state of the United Nations, were murdered, while their country's independence was forfeited. Yet nobody called these acts state terrorism. The genocide of Muslims at the hands of the Serbs has been overlooked, in favour of establishing the empire of greater Serbia and stemming the Muslim tide in Europe, *that bastion of Christianity*.

At the close of the 20th century, the Serbs are repeating in Bosnia the evil done by the Zionists in Palestine nearly half a century ago: the uprooting, and expulsion of a people from their homeland, and the creation of a new state under the banner of international legality, with the major powers' complicity and approval.

Terrorism has often served in the creation of states, such as Israel in the land of Palestine. Now terrorists have become rulers recognised by the world. They are applauded in Congress, in America, land of the free. Israel's history was written in blood at Deir Yassin, and proceeded from massacre to massacre, all the way to Qana.

Israeli practices include occupying the territories of three countries, throwing out the inhabitants, demolishing their homes, abducting their leaders, and murdering those who dare to fight for their freedom. But the Israelis are not called terrorists; the *explicit* policy of "breaking children's bones" is referred to with embarrassment, not horror. Palestinian blood is the price for Israel's legitimate right to self-defence. But those who destroy their own lives to redeem those of their people are the ones branded terrorists. Israel's "rubber bullets" are not terror, but the antiquated Katyushas of the Lebanese resistance groups in the north of occupied Palestine are weapons of terror.

Persecution of the Oriental Jews, the enslavement of the Falasha, the belief that black people's blood is less pure than that of Western Jews, the exclusion of Arab Jews from political and military leadership: none of those is terrorism. But an attack on a truck filled with Israeli soldiers who would not hesitate to shoot a child, or a stone thrown at a hostile settler, armed to the teeth: these are acts of terrorism, not legitimate defence.

The application of such double standards has become commonplace in the Western media. State violence has been acclaimed as the art of governing to ensure security. It is defined as the defence of values, of principles, freedom and democracy. The struggle of a people to defend their legitimate rights is known as terrorism.

Until recently, two powers struggled for global supremacy: the presence of the socialist bloc represented a challenging and restraining power to the US. Following the collapse of the USSR, the US became the sole perpetrator of conflict. Islam replaced communism as the traditional enemy of the US. *It had to be besieged, fought, threatened*, marred and defamed, so that America may continue to justify its complete global hegemony. It imposed sanctions on Iraq after the liberation of Kuwait, and punished Libya for suspected crimes. It threatened Sudan and Iran. Every day, the US fights to associate Islam with violence, terrorism, aggression, and violations of human rights. As a self-appointed globo-cop, it patronises other countries and exploits the international agencies for the execution of its policies.

Riyadh, Dhahran, Lockerbie, Oklahoma, Atlanta: this is the people's response to the US. Human nature cannot bend *eternally* before a superpower that punishes and rewards, threatens and humiliates, judges and condemns.

The US has cast itself in the role of God. But the refusal to pay obeisance has been manifested most clearly on its domestic front. Since terrorism is always portrayed as an imported crime, the US usually refuses to attribute it to home-grown armed racists. US policy makers tend to forget that even Middle Eastern terrorists were originally recruited and trained by the CIA in Afghanistan.

Terrorism on US soil — the World Trade Center bombing, for example — is blamed on immigrants. But the entire population of America is composed of immigrants. The great melting-pot was the American dream. Has it come true at last?

The writer is a professor of philosophy at Cairo University.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

What's in a word?

Al-tatbi', or normalisation, is one of those words of which the recent introduction to the Arabic language is at once evident in its clumsiness. While it jars less on the ear than another late addition to our vocabulary, the horrific *khaskhasa* (privatisation), its recent foreign antecedents are no less blatantly obvi*ous.* The term is not ours and, as a number of writers, notably Galal Amin, have underlined, it is a term with deliberately positive connotations: a 'normal' state being clearly better than an 'abnormal' one. Neither of these features of normalisation need have been of very great concern. Modern Arabic has appropriated thousands of terms which originated in foreign languages, while in all languages common usage can transform positive dictionary connotations into negative ones, and vice versa. Indeed, for the great majority of 'normal' Egyptians, *al-tatbi'* is a dirty word.

Phonetic clumsiness and positive nuances are, in fact, only superficial expressions of the real problems we encounter when using the term. Normalisation does not stand alone, but is intractably linked to a host of other terms, notions and symbols that are made coherent only with reference to the integrated discourse of the US-led peace process. The role that language was going to play in steering the Arabs and Palestinians towards an Israeli peace was made evident very early on. The key to the discourse, both conceptually and on the ground, was to establish Arab-Israeli peace as a *process*. I have referred before to the occasion, more than twenty years ago, when then President Sadat stumbled in a speech on a new word to which Henry Kissinger had introduced him, apparently, only a few days before. While on the rostrum delivering his nationally *televised speech*, the late president had to appeal to his aides for an Arabic word for "momentum", which Sadat used to pronounce with a double 'm' at the end. Kissinger had convinced him that we had, first and foremost, to develop "a *momentumm* for peace", which, irrespective of its Arabic equivalent, actually translates as giving free concessions — now called "confidence building" — and hoping for the other party's subsequent benevolence.

The incident, which many found amusing at the time, traces the early beginnings of the "peace process discourse" — a massive and intricate structure of meaning designed specifically to distort and disguise the fundamental reality of Zionist occupation and oppression, and the blatantly racist "Jewish supremacism" which lies at the heart of the American-Israeli "peace process" in the region. The unquestioning Arab acceptance of this discourse was more complicity than gullibility.

Looking at normalisation from this perspective, one is struck at once by the fact that we are speaking of a deal — one, moreover, based on totally false premises. "Land for peace", an expression coined a few years after the October War of 1973, was from the start "land for normalisation" — the Arabs having declared immediately in the aftermath of that war their "strategic choice for peace". The "genuineness" of that "choice" was almost immediately made clear to all by arrangements on the ground, underlined amid high drama as Sadat, in 1975, re-enacted Khedive Ismail's opening of the Suez Canal.

But if land for normalisation is supposed to be the basis of the peace process, what does that make of all the tear-jerking odes in praise of "dialogue", "mutual understanding", "overcoming hatred and suspicion", and the rest of the poetic tradition so favoured by American TV anchors and Scandinavian busybodies? We are, after all, supposed to be in a marketplace, exchanging one thing that the Arabs want — land — for another, that the Israelis presumably want — normalisation. True, the peace process has been designed from the start to force the Arabs to deliver first, and then wait for Israel to meet its side of the bargain, which, in turn, has meant that the Israelis, with the full backing of the Americans, continually ask for more and deliver less, if anything at all. But this is the language of power, not of morality.

Let us examine the presumed barter more closely. What is being exchanged, supposedly, is our legitimate right to our own land, illegally oc*cupied by force, in return for offering Israel our* "friendship", "cooperation", "understanding". What does one call someone who offers his friendship or love for material gain? Mere considerations of personal dignity would oblige one to reject such a barter, irrespective of whether Israel meets its side of the bargain.

In the peace process discourse, however, there are wheels within wheels. "Land for peace", at any rate, is much more than a code word for "land-for-normalisation". Rather, it encapsulates a totally Zionist perspective of the whole history and current reality of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Translated, land for peace — i.e., normalisation — actually reads: tiny, beleaguered but brave Israel, desperately seeking peace with its Arab neighbours, faced with fanatical rejection, is finally forced to seize some Arab land to allow its Arab neighbours to see the light, concede *its existence, make peace, embrace it in their* midst. The usurpation of Palestine and the continuing dispossession and oppression of its people are made to disappear, as are the relentless acts of aggression and humiliation directed against an openly despised and scorned Arab people, whose lives, along with the lives of their children, cities, villages and basic livelihood, are all held hostage to Israeli "security" (read: uncontested supremacy).

So even as we make "normalisation" a dirty word, we cannot escape the totally distortive ideological baggage to which it is intimately linked. We become victims of our own rhetoric, which, indeed, is the only evidence the Israeli and Western propaganda machines have had to stand the real history of the conflict on its head. Israel has never sought peace with the Arabs, but their land, and their submission to being dispossessed of that land.

And what is "normal" about the destruction and obliteration of 4,000 towns and villages? What is normal about a Palestinian labourer being miserably underpaid to build a subsidised house for a recently-arrived Russian, or American, Jewish family, on his own land — land on which he and countless generations of his forefathers have lived and worked? What is normal about that Palestinian labourer actually being forced to demand "the right" to build the house, if he and his children are to escape starvation? What is normal about Deir Yassin, about Sharon popping open champagne bottles as he and his generals wrought death and destruction over Beirut, or about Peres justifying the mass murder of 100 civilians, men, women and children, in Qana, as legitimate vengeance for the "Jewish blood" of a couple of his occupation soldiers?

Normalisation in the Middle East actually *means* bringing an end to the Zionist project of occupation, dispossession and domination. To achieve that kind of normalisation, though, we need, among many other things, to establish a genuinely popular and increasingly powerful boycott of Zionist Israel. The South Africans did it. Why can't we?

Dancing on the moon

Three concerts, three moods. David Blake goes from first to last


Nassir Shama

Oud Recital; Nassir Shama; Finale of the Arab Musical Festival; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 10 November

Lutes are musical history. From where did they evolve their strange magic? From the furthestmost point East where the mountains slide into the Pacific Ocean. Like the viol, a distant relative, they have a lordly grandeur. Visitors of the night, they suggest the devil as well as god. They are instruments of the long haul, shoulder baggage of the itinerant wanderers, cruising saints and thugs, with a voice suggesting romance and fire in far places.

Who knows the lute? Not even the player. It avoids all contact. Only Bach understood it.

And Shama. He doesn't exist as name or person when he begins to play. He melts into the instrument, becoming one with it and perhaps a soul called Nassir Shama who does something with the strings. But not for sure, not a man. It must be a soul who plays — no mere man has such scandalous expertise. His meditations are like Hamlet over the skull of Yorik.

He sits at his place. The hands of Cocteau fall into their position relative to the strings. The figure bends like a Japanese Buddhist monk, and the concentration waves commence, but he, the name and the fame, have disappeared. Best look at the stars when he plays — you won't find him near the instrument.

The *oud* is a difficult instrument to play. The best artists really make little of it. The sound is often like straw or metal; it refuses to divulge to anyone.

What to make of this player who now strokes it into any form he wishes? No programme, no notes, nothing about what or where in this concert. The audience knows everything, so does anyone who hears him. Words don't matter; you have the music. At first he is air spun. At the second, all echoes — phrases repeated like wraiths coming from a far distance. Everything then floats via strange threads of sound into the major key. His feeling for every musical nuance is so perfect you feel you have never heard the key of E major before. Maybe Chopin played it like this — a key of remorse.

Then it stamps, but not flamenco though Spain can be felt. His sound is one of impatience at delay before he is off into another world. His tone, bell-like, liquid light, is not heard from any other player.

He plays the introduction to an Umm Kulthum song. The audience goes into deep attention. Where is the woman in all this grandeur? There behind him, very portentous and chilling. These ghosts move about through the lutean landscape which the audience is breathing. Mildly and soft, like cats dancing on the moon. The evocation of Um Kulthum goes into variations, slamming effects, thrilling with the deep bass sounds this *oud* player alone can bring from the instrument. The *oud* is Shama's orchestra — sound echoes. Whatever the Small Hall does not like acoustically, and that's plenty, it adores Shama.

The end is approaching, he intimates. He is going into sheer virtuosity, showing off his powers, becoming human. Is there a player of such an instrument as the *oud* alive to compare with him? Suddenly comes a melody, so simple, so heart-easing, like an ancient Venetian gondolier's song, but further East. From where? From where the songs that bend the hard heart of the world come.

In gentle glissandi waves of sound, blue and sun tan, the song carries him out of reach. It is over. Shama has appeared once again on his chair and come into the sweaty, ordinary world of the living.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Children's Concert; solo piano, Ghada Shaker and Iman Shaker; conductor, Christoph Campestrini; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 9 November

A nice, mad concert. Unexpected, unrehearsed, but informal and funny. The children arrived, swarming through the Opera House and at least looking angelic. They filled the Opera. They laughed and shrieked during the *Carnivale des Animaux* of Saint-Saens and roared in the right places. Angels they were.

After the intermission, a new piece by the Austrian composer Victor Fortin called *Archibald's Adventure* with a long amusing speech narration by Ernst Ekker — in English. The poor, beautiful kids were given this narration in a foreign language of which they would understand almost nothing.

They were out to enjoy themselves, so the mere problem of not knowing a word did not stop them from venting high spirits and generous applause. Angels indeed.

The conductor of *Archibald* was new here, Christoph Campestrini from Linz, Austria. He was light but often too loud through no fault of his own. The two narrators, Neveen Allouba and Raouf Zaidan, were placed in the centre of the orchestra, not away or above it. So most of their talk went for nothing and was a blurred haze erased by the orchestra.

Fortin's music was fine for everyone: kids and what are called grown-ups, general appeal in a style post-modern. Clever, beautifully composed and witty. It should have a future in an important sphere, the young and for the older young. There was not a dull or second hand sound in it.

Zaidan was Archibald and Allouba, a mini-man-robot called Robowiff. Zaidan's voice was mid-Atlantic ivy league; Allouba, Miss Marple, Bugs Bunny and Maggie Smith. In spite of inaudibility, the two singers do know how to act and deliver spoken lines. The children loved them and they got laughs.

Archibald's voyage is to outer space, to seven planets in search of a singing mountain. The travelers go through space adventures, not a bit like cinematic ones. Robot Allouba was acid, sharp, but with a soft underside. Archibald sounded like the husband of Virginia Woolf. They sparred, made it up and finally Robowiff leans lovingly towards Archie and says "Will you please give me singing lessons?"

It was a happy end, all in the cadence of a voice. Impossible fun among the swinging cosmos. There should be more such concerts.

The Gamal Abdel-Rahim Second Annual Memorial Concert; Ewart Hall, the American University in Cairo; 8 November

These memorial concerts for Gamal Abdel-Rahim, however worthy, are a trial for many surviving enthusiasts. This one, for example, was literally taken over by the TV crew. They went about the place ignoring the fact that an audience was also there and a concert was in progress. They were like a road construction gang.

At these shows it should be composer first, musician second, audience third and then the TV crew. TV crew first, last and then the middle may be a good idea for projecting an image, in this case Abdel-Rahim's, but is hard, and impossibly rude, to everyone else. As the concert progressed it grew more like a bar-room than a memorial musical occasion, with the boys at the back enjoying the big smoke, exchanging gossip and jokes.

The Cairo Opera House manages these things better. No moving, no lights and no noise, not even the crackle of programme paper.

Some items were ruined. For example, when the excellent young soprano Dalia Farouk did her best to ignore the noise, she was drowned out.

The concert produced, in spite of the field maneuvers of the TV crew, some good music by Abdel-Rahim. Flutist, Inas Abdel-Dayem, harpist Samira Michel and percussion Nesma Abdel-Aziz did a piece which began dramatically and showed this composer's genuine gift for melody, however complicated it often is.

The *Rhapsody for cello*, with Hassan Moatazz, showed Abdel-Rahim's way of escaping the Egyptian classic stock ending in rounds of repeats. He ignores tradition and goes straight on and forward. He never ends meekly in the maze, but always clean and upwards to something new. All his music shows this lively aspect in spite of the difficulties some listeners find in it. In the cello work there were traces of jazz rhythms which seasoned the sound.

Awatef El-Sharqawi sang, not in her best voice but with an understanding of Abdel-Rahim's vocal laments from his musical settings of Aeschylus. They lie very low for her voice. Maybe she expressed the emotions, but Abdel-Rahim's treatment of the voice in music so far shown does not suggest he loves it as an instrument.

The Conservatoire String Orchestra, conducted by Mounir Nasreddin, accompanied the singer before performing the *Little suite for strings* in five short movements. This was an easy listen. The pieces are not related but seem to be night music. The sound of the orchestra is light and amusing. The composition stops and starts and the orchestra seems to play two different actions at the same time. It is all very clever, worked up perfectly, going through Spanish rhythms. There is a nervous tick in the music, some Ligeti-like dots, and it suddenly stops. Abdel-Rahim in light mood.

Somewhere over the rainbow he really is the beginning of Egypt's contemporary music. The generation after him grew in his atmosphere, so this concert showed its meaning in spite of fierce competition from the TV crew.

Maya Narimanidze played one movement from a fantasy-rondo from a piano sonata by second generation composer Mauna Ghoneim. Ghoneim has her own method of dealing with folkloric tunes and putting them through the hoop — variety. In this piece there is really only one tune, which goes through extraordinary metamorphoses, extraordinary lumps and jumps to the extreme ends of the piano. Amusing, technically difficult and played splendidly. It is a clever fantasy full of attitudes and changing rhythms and sounds happy for the pianist.

Tunes and tunes again. Ragueh Daoud has a piece, *Esprit Espagnol*, for viola (played by Achil Kharadze) and piano (again Maya Narimanidze). High piano, low deep violin: unusual juxtaposition. Very folkloric, a dance with voices. All the music played at this concert was very close to dance.

Mohamed Abdel-Fattah. A *Canon for two violins*. A first performance. A pity some of this music had such a rough passage with the TV crew. This and some of the concluding offerings were merely part of a TV show.

Sherif Mohieddin's *Suite for solo oboe: five miniatures* was also a premiere. Lucky for the composition that the crew's voices abated. But the mood of the concert had gone. It was no longer serious. People in the audience began greeting each other as the bar room atmospherics intensified.

Aly Osman El-Hajj's *Rhapsody for violin*, which sounded dance-like, was played by Tamer Talaat. This was followed by El-Hajj's *Song for soprano, strings and oboe*. Dalia Farouk has a lovely voice. She looked splendid but disturbed. Bursts of sound overplayed her song.

It was the end of the party. The crew looked like nice boys; they should have served us drinks.

Cinema

Birds of a feather

Khairiya El-Bishlawi watches a sequel that fails to take off

In 1994 a film by the title of *Ya Teheb Ya Te'eb* (Either You Make Love or Money) was released. A comedy, it addressed the issue of unemployment among young graduates which makes marriage practically impossible for the vast majority.

Given the crisis through which Egyptian cinema is passing, such vital economic and social issues are often given far less weight than they deserve, in keeping with the dictates of the box-office. And yet, there have been several films that have successfully struck a balance between entertainment and the demands of a social message, foremost among them being *Ya Donia Ya Gharami*.

In *Ya Teheb Ya Te'eb*, a group of young men take up all manner of manual jobs that are beneath their status as university graduates and, reaching the end of their tethers, end up marrying wealthy older women. And yet, even this contrived solution to their financial problems falls through when the elderly wives die and the young men find themselves back on the streets, turning all manner of tricks on innocent bumpkins.

The sequel to the film, currently showing in the cinemas, bears the title *Hanheb Wa Ne'eb* (We'll Make Love and Money), which leads the cinema-goer to believe that the problems of the young men will be solved — that they will find both love and money. This second instalment, perhaps for the sake of unity, has the same cast of male leads who recycle the same punch-lines to elicit the same forced laughter.

Hanheb Wa Ne'eb; from left: Al-Montassir Billah, Farouk El-Fishawi and Ahmed Adam

Once again, we find a work that seeks to discuss serious issues utilising the most modest artistic techniques. Given the usual compromises, the film lapses commercially, despite a cast composed of several stars of commercial theatre — Ahmed Adam, El-Montassir Billah, Salah Abdullah and Hussein Sherbini, as well as Farouk El-Fishawi. The comic abilities of these actors notwithstanding, the laughs remain false. The ironical situations, the racy dialogue, the gags in this film deserve at best a smile.

This is a film that goes out of its way not to tax the viewer's intelligence, with the result that it becomes totally unconvincing. Not even Wafaa Amer, the guest star, with her revealing dance costume, can convince the viewers that they got their money's worth. Likewise, the talented child singer Islam, packaged here as the film's discovery, fails to instil any hope in the future. Not only is he a miniature singer imitating the fully grown, but his "number" is forced on an already contrived film. *Hanheb Wa Ne'eb* is a concoction of a bit of commercial theatre, a handful of numbers lifted from Pyramid Street cabarets, a dash of vaudeville, and a spoonful of melodrama. Apart from the failed attempt to address social issues such as unemployment, it includes for good measure a pseudo-moral message for the purposes of a happy ending. For a director whose filmography includes more than 15 films, *Hanheb Wa Ne'eb* is surprisingly lacking both backbone and a unifying theme.

It is not only that the audience becomes alienated by the unconvincing sequences from the start. The fact is that all the clowning and prancing around is done by actors who are too plump and old for this kind of thing. One of them goes around trying to sell rich people birds he has coloured himself; another hawks chickens which he pretends can dance, and so on.

As for the actresses (Ola Rami, Manal Abdel-Latif and Donia), their disguises fall equally flat. There is the tale of the women graduates in search of work who fall in with the three con men at the school for the elderly established by one of our heroes in a villa he inherited from his deceased wife (see part one). Yet the confidence tricks in this and other episodes in the film leave the viewers with the uncomfortable impression that they themselves are being had.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Youth Salon
Centre of Arts, 1, Maahad El-Swissri, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 23 Nov.
Annual showing of new works by young artists.

Contemporary Egyptian Art
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786 100. Daily 9am-10pm.

Essam Sedqi El-Gabakhnagui (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 13 Nov.

Heinrich Böll: His Life and Works (Documents)
Goethe Institute, Language Studies Department, 14 Hussein Wassef St, Missaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 348 4500. Until 13 Nov.

Omar El-Fayoumi (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 14 Nov.

Anna Orphanou Gulyás (Paintings)
Spiro Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77c, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 14 Nov.
Oil and water paintings by the wife of the Cypriot ambassador under the title Mexican Souvenirs.

Egyptian Features
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 2287. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 15 Nov.
Black and white photographs from the collection of Elwi Farid.

Dimitri Papadimos
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Nov.
Sixty-eight black and white photographs by the Greek artist, entitled Gourna 48, showing the village built by Hassan Fathy.

Mohamed Mandour (Pottery)
British Council Gallery, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 303 1514. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 21 Nov.

Hassan Aziz Hassan (Paintings) & **Massimo Baistrocchi** (Graphic Designs)
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat. Until 25 Nov.

Anna Orphanou Gulyás

Albrecht Dürer
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Zamalek, c/o Goethe Institute, tel 575 9877. Until 25 No.
Fifty-six reproductions of sixteenth century woodworks.

The Eighth AUC Student Art Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 26 Nov.

Ihab Shaker (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 29 Nov.

Jerry Zeniuk (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 29 Nov.

Wafai Rifaat (Sculpture) and **Farouk Shehata** (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Opening 19 Nov, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 6 Dec.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
15 Nov, 6pm: **Io Ballo Da Sola**, directed by Bertolucci.
16 Nov, 6pm: **La Commare Secca** (1962), directed by Bertolucci.

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
16 Nov, 7pm: **Le Fils Préféré**, as above.
17 Nov, 7pm: **Petits Arrangements Avec Les Morts**, directed by Pascal Ferran.
19 Nov, 4pm: **Entrée Ecole Sortie Cinéma**, directed by Jean-Louis Comolli.
French Cultural Institute, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
18 Nov, 7pm: **Le Fils Préféré**, directed by Nicole Garcia.

Effi Briest
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 17 Nov, 6.30pm.
Directed by Werner Fassbinder, based on the novel by Fontane.

Japanese Film Festival
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 354 9431. All films start at 6pm.
13 Nov: **Gate of Hell**, directed by Kinugasa Teinosuke.
16 Nov: **Twenty-Four Eyes**, directed by Kinoshita Keisuke.
17 Nov: **Love Is Shared Like Sweets**, directed by Toyoda Shiro.
18 Nov: **Undercurrent**, directed by Yoshimuria Kozaburo.
19 Nov: **Not Long After Leaving Shinagawa**, directed by Kawashima Yuzo.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Batman And Robin
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Speed 2
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

My Best Friend's Wedding
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

Father's Day
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, [illegible] Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Galgameth
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Volcano
Odeon II, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797.
With Tommy Lee Jones.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9.pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

Hanheb Wa Ne'eb (We'll Make Love and Money)
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Farouq El-Fishawi.

Afreet El-Nahar (Daytime Demons)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Elham Shahin.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Youssef Chahine's latest production, with Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida and Safeiya El-Emari.

MUSIC

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926 13 Nov, 8pm.
With piano soloist Katrin Karaban, conducted by Sarvar Ganiev.

Quartetto d'Archi di Roma
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 Nov, 8pm.
Vittoriodi and Stefano Di Lotti (violin), Aldo Giovagnoli (viola) and Mini Chirivi (cello) perform selection from Donizetti, Puccini and Beethoven.

L'Ensemble Orchestral de Paris
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Nov, 8pm & Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 18 Nov, 8pm.

Violin Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Nov, 8pm.
Mohamed Osman performs.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 16 Nov, 8pm.
With Ayman El-Hanboly (cello) and conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Cairo Opera String Quartet
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 Nov, 8pm.

Classic Ballet
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 17 Nov, 11am.
Performance by the students of the High Institute of Art.

Egyptian Musical Youth
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 Nov, 8pm.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 19 Nov, 8pm.

THEATRE

White Hands
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 13 Nov, 7.30pm.
A monodrama performed and directed by Ahmed Abdel-Rahman.

Kiss Me Kate
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. 13-17 & 20-22 Nov, 8pm.
The AUC Theatre Company, directed by Krista Scott and choreographed by Indji El-Solh, base their performance on the music and lyrics by Cole Porter and the book by Sam and Bella Spewack.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinat Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm

Tarnima II (Hymn II)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.

Senoubi
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9.30pm.

El-Qa'eda Wal Estethna' (The Rule and the Exception)
El-Zorqani Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8.30pm.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.

Ayam El-Insan El-Sab'a (The Seven Days of Man)
El-Ghouri Palace, El-Azhar, El-Hossein. Tel 511 0472. Daily 10pm.

LECTURES

Living Monuments; Conservation of a Yemenite Mosque
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 13 Nov, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Zeinab ben Hamida.

Debate on the Notion of Virtue in Two Cultures
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 13 Nov, 6pm.
Round Table Discussion headed by professors Vernant and Sheikh Moussa.

The Circassian Mamluks (1382-1517)
American Research Centre, 2 Simon Bolivar Sq, Garden City. Tel 354 8239. 17 Nov, 5pm.
The fourth of the five slide-lecture series on the Islamic architecture of Cairo, by William Lyster.

The Mediterranean Region: Tension, Conflict and Cooperation
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436, 17 Nov, 5pm.
Lecturers are Christian Falkowsky, Dr Mostafa Elwi Saif, professor of Political Science and Paul Sullivan, AUC professor of Economics.

Magic and Magicians in Ancient Egypt and Beyond
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 17 Nov, 7pm.
Lecture by Carla Gallorini, assistant secretary to the Egypt Exploration Society, London.

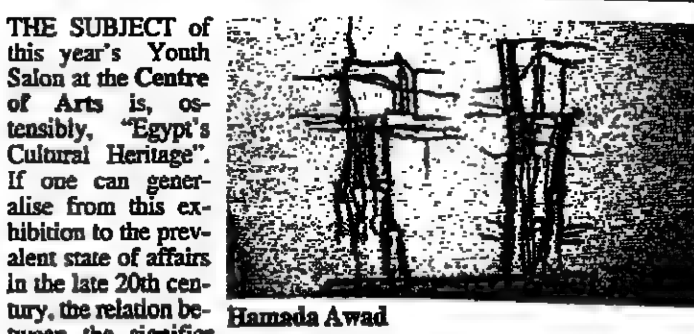
Between Literature and Politics: Transformations of the Literary Institution, from the 60s to the 90s
CEDEJ, 14 Abdel-Rahman El-Sawi, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 18 Nov, 5pm.
Lecture, in French, by Richard Jacquemond, CEDEJ.

Magallon
French Cultural Institute, as above. 19 Nov, 7pm.
Lecture by Amin Fakhry Abdel-Nour.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

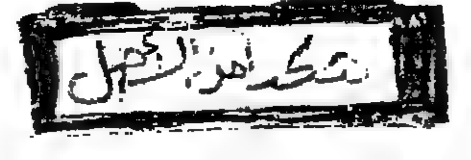
Around the galleries


Hamada Awad

THE SUBJECT of this year's Youth Salon at the **Centre of Arts** is, ostensibly, "Egypt's Cultural Heritage". If one can generalise from this exhibition to the prevalent state of affairs in the late 20th century, the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary indeed. What does the abstract, cut-out type painting by **Khaled Mekkawi**, awarded first prize, have to do with Egypt's culture? What do the bits and pieces — nails, aluminium strips, slivers of glass — by **Ayman El-Samari** (second prize, painting) have to do with Egypt's culture, or with painting for that matter? And abstract sculptures put together from iron rods and fragments by **Abdel-Ghani Mohamed** (first prize) or by **Hamada Awad** (special jury prize), what have they to do with the ostensible theme of this year's Youth Salon? Prize winning ceramic works including that by **Diaa Daoud El-Din** (first prize), too, are either derivative or blissfully ignore "Egypt's cultural heritage".

Salama Gallery hosts paintings and watercolours by **Sidqi El-Gabakhangi** and **Essam El-Gabakhangi**. Works by the former, who had his first exhibition in the 1930s, comprise landscapes while those by the younger, more contemporary artist are abstract in orientation.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**





هكذا من الإصل

Hook, line and sinker

What's wrong with the face? And what's wrong with grey? Not much, writes **Nigel Ryan**


George Bahgory


Hassan Aziz Hassan

Walk into the Mashrabiya Gallery at the moment and it has a positively carnavalesque feel. There are faces, faces everywhere, crowding the larger canvasses, individually framed in the smaller. There is a crowd staring from the walls, and by and large it is a good tempered crowd.

The festive atmosphere is reinforced by the fact that a good many of the exhibits are collage pieces, containing pieces of the kind of printed fabric that is used in wedding and funeral tents. And contributing to the general air of geniality is the fact that several of the faces that stare down at you from the walls belong to none other than the artist himself — George Bahgory.

Bahgory, who weekly portrays others on these pages, is apparently fascinated by his own physiognomy. And well might he be. Possessed of the kind of face that in other, more polite times, would have been described as interesting, it must be refreshing to have something intrinsically appealing on which to focus his gaze. Regardless of their other achievements, the faces of those consistently in the news appear to be distinguished largely by their blandness. Alas, such, perhaps, is the price of greatness. To think continually of them, as Bahgory must, one suspects becomes at times a little trying.

If there are only two obvious self-portraits included in the exhibition, there are tens of oblique references. Indeed, for a moment, the figure in the startling, tent makers' fabric décolleté, bore a striking resemblance to the artist. On second glance, though, this might simply have been the result of the manner in which he schematises faces.

Bahgory certainly makes a great many nods towards the kind of picture plane fracturing most commonly used by the synthetic cubists. The eyes generally have it — staring out full frontal from what one expects to be three quarters profiles. Intriguingly, it is the two straightforward self-portraits that dispense with this fracturing, together with a small study of apples. Yet more fruits rain down across the two largest canvasses, infinitely better observed, and a good deal more voluptuous, than the small, distorted, insistently planar female nude hanging in the first gallery.

The Mashrabiya's current exhibition is fun. Bright, occasionally gaudy — even the most sombre images, crowds with fish, the surface of the canvas split into three levels, river, ground and a kind of submarine underworld, and the occasional mouth pinched into a rectal pucker — cannot disguise the irrepressibly good nature of its creator. And even at its most acid, Bahgory's palette allows for subtlety, as suddenly the psychedelic cacophony gives way to the muted, pale blue stripes of a faded *galabiya*. In places, this is a beautifully observed exhibition, kindly and good humoured, capable of casting a benign eye even over hot, crowded, sweaty Cairo streets.

At the Italian Cultural Centre in Zamalek Hassan Aziz Hassan is currently exhibiting alongside Massimo Baistrocchi. And it makes for some interesting juxtapositions — the meticulous prints of the latter being hung between the former's increasingly robust abstracts.

There is nothing fey about Hassan Hassan's painting, which is all to the good since even a hint of feyness is enough to undermine abstract works. If such pieces are to succeed, bereft, as it were, of any hint of figuration, having consciously abandoned mimetic conceits, they must do so on their own terms. And nothing shines through such painting more glaringly than insincerity, of which there is not a whiff in this exhibition.

To characterise Hassan Hassan's concerns as being essentially painterly may well be to state the obvious but it is a statement that needs to be made. From the three smallish canvasses hung side by side to the right of the entrance to the exhibition — a kind of carefully modulated op art comprising meticulously applied arcs of paint whose tonal values cause the dappled surfaces of the canvas to undulate — to the sweeping gestures of later, larger canvasses, the artist's concerns are always with the possibilities inherent in the manipulation of paint across flat surfaces.

In some of the largest pieces the paint is impastoed, smeared in dramatic, diagonal lines, the saturated colour left to solidify in ridges. Others nod politely in the direction of Abstract Expressionism, making no bones about the metaphysical loading of gesture, though never at the expense of exploring the plastic possibilities of the stuff with which such gestures are recorded. In the darkest paintings background colours shine through the glossy, sometimes black surfaces, at once energetic and sombre, stormy rather than nocturnal.

Mysterious dark lines hang in the illusory spaces created, thrown into relief by the sudden appearance of a luminous, saturated red, or a band of apparently discordant orange. As a colourist Hassan Hassan leaves few, if any, hostages to chance. And even when these agitated, and at times ostentatiously Romantic surfaces — squint slightly and many of these paintings might be mistaken for the swirling, atmospherically loaded details that crowd the background of German Romantic landscape — flatten into uninterrupted, monochromatic planes, he remains in absolute control of effect. Grey might not seem promising, but look at number 15, an absolutely flat surface, lacking stripes and swirls, or any obvious signs of brush stroke, and it becomes apparent that grey can describe a great deal. Colour, paint, line — energetic, explosive, and in repose. It might seem a limited range of formal qualities with which to play, but playing with them is what painting is about. And paint is what Hassan Aziz Hassan does. Extraordinarily well.

Massimo Baistrocchi's prints punctuate these larger canvasses with exacting entomological studies, mythical creatures, picturesque scenes, and cryptic ciphers. There is, in some of these works, more than a hint of the bestiary, an impression underlined by the fact that all the pieces are book plate size.

A lizard sticks out its tongue, about to eat a may fly. Improbable insects fly or crawl across red, handmade paper. In two works fantastic creatures, hybrid, half-human apish things stand alone, evolutionary misfits whose only option is solitude.

A junk sails across the harbour of a Fritz Lang metropolis, the onion domes of an orthodox church stand outside crenellated castle walls. There is invariably something slightly askew about Baistrocchi's version of the picturesque — not sufficiently stated to compromise, but resonant enough to disturb. And just as there is always something a little too alien about insects, whether hard and crunchy or soft and winged, so these landscapes disorient through their otherness.

In the remaining prints, cryptic elements are more obviously stated. Chinese zodiac signs and Ashanti symbols — exercises in calligraphy, yes, but obvious symbols, too, that will remain forever opaque to the uninitiated.

For full details of the exhibitions reviewed, see Listings *opposite*

A more flexible odalisque

Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih examines the varieties of strait-jacket that have limited Western picturings of the Orient

At one time, the Orient was just the land of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the *feminised* Other. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Orient was conceived through a one-sided view, fictionalised by the West. With the appearance of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the discourse of the Orient has engaged scholars from different parts of the world. The Orient has now become a middle ground to be negotiated by East and West. The First Public Symposium held by the Dahesh Museum in New York added new perspectives to the discourse of Orientalism. Six participants presented papers focusing on the theme "Picturing the Middle East: A Hundred Years of Orientalism" — papers now gathered in a volume under the same title. Along with the symposium, an exhibition of the works of the most famous Orientalists was held.


Lehnert & Landrock Studio; Rudolf Lehnert (Austrian, 1878-1948) and Ernest Landrock (Austrian, 1878-1966): *Market*. Photogravure

The papers presented reveal a common approach to Orientalist art. They all agree that the Orient was a European construct. In portraying the Orient — the Other — Western painters were setting new dimensions to their self-portraits. That sought for image, however, varied from one European nation to another. The interests of British and American artists differed from the French.

In "Why Some Orientalists Traveled to the Middle East", Gerald Ackerman offers a survey with statistical estimates of the reasons British and American artists chose to visit the Middle East. According to Ackerman, they did not only go there driven by the spirit of adventure, but by commercial motivations as well. The British and American public were in favour of picturesque views of remote places. The earliest painter-travelers were commercial artists. The more serious British painters sought accuracy in Biblical scenery to purify religious iconography from the Catholic tradition. They came to Egypt and Syria with the belief that time had stopped in these lands. Biblical Orientalists not only gave a counter-image to Catholic iconography, but to French eroticism as well. Perhaps it was the Anglo-American puritanical attitude that brought the Orientalist artists closer to contemporary Middle Eastern life.

The growing realistic trend was promoted by the appearance of photography, a medium that gave rise to new questions. In "Orientalist Photography and its 'Mistaken' Pictures", Julia Ballerini propounds that the introduction of photography with its apparent mimeticism has diverted the representational problems that have puzzled painters. The representational difficulty of how to indicate a non-visual concept in painting was put in a different perspective by photography. In her analysis of some photographs, Ballerini has manifested that what had been thought of as photographic accidents or mistakes were part and parcel of its innovative role. By picturing ruins of Ancient Egypt, photography *was not only stressing a dis*continuous past, but invoking the viewer's participation in the historical events, by mentally completing the picture.

The Orientalist photographers often had their cameras positioned on neglected monuments, to picture Ancient Egypt's lapse into forgetfulness and ruin. Hence, they invited an ambivalent response. The first was a nostalgia for the loss. The second was messianic, seeking to save the remnants from oblivion. In other words, it was a modern "crusade" that justified imperialism. The aesthetic collaborated with the discourse of colonialism.

The ambivalence associated with the Egyptomaniac attitude can also be detected in Merson's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. Eric M Zafran, among others, places Merson among the Orientalists although he never traveled to North Africa or to the East. I believe that such a categorisation was not simply evoked by the presence of the Sphinx and the desert. But again, the Egyptomaniac attitude fosters the colonial ambivalence that combines respect and the desire for appropriation. In the painting, the Virgin and child rest on the lap of the Sphinx while Joseph sleeps next to the dying embers of a fire. The juxtaposition of the two religions conveys the ambivalence between old and new, but in Merson's case, the new is transplanting the old. The divine light highlighting the child's face stands out against the celestial light *produced by the stars, and the human light signaled* by the extinguished fire. This, I may add, conveys the silent desires of a new civilization wishing to take hold of the old.

The next three presentations deal with the Oriental woman. Again, there is an ambivalent treatment in Orientalist painting alternating between "femme fatale" and "caring mother". The Orientalist image of the Eastern woman was never a constant, according to Ilene Susan Fort. This was to a large degree related to how the painters situated themselves within Oriental society. In the 18th century, the urge to paint the Orient was motivated by the desire to understand more about it. However, with the advent of Western imperialism in the 19th century, the painters became representatives of the imperial forces.

Hence the painter posited as an outsider, never to be admitted to interiors. The image of the Oriental woman was, therefore, not only constructed by the political situation, ethnic and political difference, but by gender dynamics. Their imagination transformed the earlier picturesque exoticism to sublime eroticism. Later, in the 19th century, when artists became more accommodated to Oriental society, they sought aspects of dignity in the Oriental woman. The eroticised classical nude portrayed in the odalisque or harem, was replaced by the caring mother. The Oriental woman had to function in the same gender role. She represented the nostalgic ideals of a haven that can restore manhood, or domestic dominance.

The alternation between erotic fantasies and nostalgia for male dominance only reflects the difficulties Western painters were themselves experiencing. The Oriental woman was that Other, problematising his classical vision. His claim for intellectual authority over the Orient was coupled with profound ignorance of the subject portrayed. The result was the mystification of the Other.

However, in *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Delacroix offers a different difference. Mary J. Harper shows in her paper, "The Poetics and Politics of Delacroix's Representation of the Harem", how Delacroix challenges the conventions of representation in the West, in both the choice of subject and manner of portrayal. The result is neither exoticism nor eroticism, neither nostalgia nor delusion, but mystery. Delacroix was careful not to misrepresent the Other culture: this loss of representational validity would incur the loss of the self. Delacroix's painting takes place on the borderline of a changing aesthetic, political and *sexual discourse*.

This was not the case with Ingres. His *Turkish Bath*, James Thompson insists, represents the "voyeur's view" of "beauties in the eyehole". Ingres's work represents the erotic Oriental woman par excellence. The painting is circular, suggesting a peep hole. The voyeur artist had his head turned by this circular world, the ideal container for the roundness of breasts and bellies. The women's faces are deprived of any expression. The faces become an added member to the slothful bodies. The repetitive circular rhythm stresses both the languor of the women and the painter's own erotic fantasy, a perpetual desire to keep desiring, and in doing so to continue mixing eroticism with art.

The *Proceedings of the Symposium* introduces many of the problems associated with reading Orientalness or Westernness in painting. Fixed notions of cultural identities are called in to question, now that we are determined that the odalisque has been a construct. Therefore, concepts naturalising stereotypes have to be problematised. The 'Orient' and its images might then provide a space for cultural negotiation.

Plain Talk

I vividly remember the uproar that ensued at the PEN Congress convened in New York in the early 1990s when, in response to American women writers' protestations that they had not been represented on the panels, Norman Mailer said: "There *may* be some good women writers but there are no women intellectuals." All the women, and not only the Americans among them, walked out of the meeting and Mailer had to apologise before they resumed their participation.

That incident always springs to my mind whenever I see proof contrary to Mailer's infamous dictum. Here in Egypt and in some other Arab countries, women have proven to be as intellectually capable as, and sometimes more so, than men. Apart from women writers and journalists in Egypt, we find an astounding number of women who have demonstrated a genuine and true interest in things intellectual. The majority of art galleries in Cairo have been started by women and *quite a number* of publishing enterprises owe their existence to women.

These thoughts came to my mind when I received the latest issue of *Al-Shemou* (Candles), a magazine that was the brain-child of a woman, Lotus Abdel-Karim. The magazine was launched in 1981 and its editor-in-chief was none other than Ahmed Bahaaeddin, the leading writer and journalist whose memory was honoured on these pages a few weeks ago. The motto of the magazine, an apt one indeed, is "For the value of beauty in literature, art and life".

Lotus Abdel-Karim is a graduate of Alexandria University. She had the opportunity of touring the world and thus of having first hand experience in learning a great deal about the art and literature of many countries, including England, Japan and Germany. Her ambition was to contribute to the enrichment of Egyptian and Arab arts. In addition to the magazine, she also founded a gallery, named after the magazine, in Maadi, thus giving the suburb an opportunity of having on its doorstep a place where works by many renowned artists have been exhibited. Al-Shemou gallery, for example, has had exhibitions featuring the works of such artists as Salah Taher and Ahmed Sabri, as well as numerous Arab and foreign artists.

Al-Shemou magazine has become an important channel through which interesting coverage of the artistic and literary world is published. One item which distinguishes the magazine is the "dossier" about individual artists and writers which is published with every issue. These have included Youssef El-Sebaie, Ihsan Abdel-Quddous, Ahmed Bahaaeddin, Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, Baligh Hamdi, and others.

The latest issue is an excellent example of the fruitful combining of art and literature. Apart from the usual sections like "Art around the world", the *Al-Shemou* bookshelf, the gallery and the music section, the issue has some articles worth mentioning: an article on Tewfiq El-Hakim on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, a comprehensive essay on Youssef Chahine and an in-depth article on Zakaria Ahmed, one of the founders of modern Egyptian music by Mahmoud Kamel, a leading music historian.

The pièce-de-résistance of the issue is a dossier on "a century of the short story" which is a comprehensive treatment of the development of this fairly new genre in Egypt and the Arab world. It deals with Yehia Haqqi and Mahmoud Teymour from Egypt, Walid Meemari from Syria and others. The file, short as it may be, is a useful reference for those interested in following the development of this popular genre.

One might ask how is it that such ventures as *Al-Shemoue* exist and still we know little about them. Well, some people shun publicity while others, the majority from whose imposition we suffer, run after it. Lotus Abdel-Karim belongs to the former, but in all fairness what she has been doing for over a decade deserves more attention than it has so far gained.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

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In February 1910, Egypt was rocked by the assassination of Prime Minister Butros Ghali. The assassin, Ibrahim El-Wardani, insisted he had killed Ghali because he was a British collaborator, not because he was a Copt. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** scrutinises *Al-Ahram* issues of 1910 to tell the story

"This 23-year-old slender, pallid young man was educated in the Egyptian school system until he obtained his Bachelor's Degree. When his father died several years ago, his uncle, Dr Zeifal, sent him to Switzerland to study pharmacology. He spent two years in Lausanne and then a year in England, after which he returned to Egypt. Two months ago, he opened a pharmacy on Abdin Street next to the Abdin police station. Last summer he travelled to Istanbul, from where he reported for a number of Egyptian newspapers. When he returned to Egypt after his stay in Europe, he brought with him the ideas that were current among the Russian students with whom he became acquainted. He has served as deputy director of the Handicrafts Syndicate in Boulaq."

The subject of this short biography, which appeared in *Al-Ahram* on 21 February 1910, was Ibrahim Nasef El-Wardani. El-Wardani had just made the headlines in, as *Al-Ahram* put it, "the biggest story of the 20th century": the assassination of Prime Minister Boutros Ghali. El-Wardani was the state's prime suspect.

The murder of Boutros Ghali was the first successful assassination attempt in Egypt, since the slaying a century earlier of General Kleber, who had been appointed governor of Egypt by Napoleon. In the latter instance, the motive was clear: to rid Egypt of the leader of a foreign occupying power. In the general shock of the Ghali incident, the national press, particularly *Al-Ahram*, was unable to find any justification whatsoever. Evidently, in an attempt to protect El-Wardani from reprisals by men loyal to the slain prime minister, Fathi Zaghlul, deputy minister of justice at the time, rushed El-Wardani into his chambers inside the Foreign Ministry where he had his office and asked him, "Why did you do this?" El-Wardani answered, "Because he was a traitor to the country." Zaghlul turned his head away and said, "You poor creature. If you had only realised that Boutros Ghali was the most loyal and dedicated patriot to serve our country you would never have committed that act."

Al-Ahram was keen to discover the personality of the assassin. With little to go on, it gave a day-by-day account of El-Wardani's behaviour in prison. On the first day, it wrote, "He is entirely calm and composed as though he had not committed that heinous crime which causes us all to tremble. He asks for any food or drink that he desires and sleeps with the greatest tranquillity. Last night he had yoghurt and eggs and, when sated, he slept as soundly as a baby." The second day he appeared equally composed and only asked for an extra blanket. By the third day, however, his resiliance began to break down. On the basis of reports by those who saw him taken to preliminary hearings, "the suspect showed signs of confusion and panic and he appeared quite frail." On the fourth day, *Al-Ahram* wrote, "El-Wardani appears quite broken now that he has finally admitted the existence of a secret society, although he still refuses to reveal the names of its members. He also confessed that he was a member in a secret society in Switzerland." As the trial progressed, El-Wardani's condition continued to deteriorate. Two weeks into the trial, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent reports, "When I saw him being led by policemen to the public prosecutor's office or back to prison, he appeared extremely frail and despondent."

The government, as well as the press, were certain that these must have been accomplices. At first, suspicions were directed toward members of the Nationalist Party. According to *Al-Ahram*, "The police conducted a search of the homes of Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish, Ali Bek Fahmi Kamel, Mohamed Bek Farid, the chairman of the party, and Mahmoud Bek Hassib and confiscated the papers they found. None of the above were questioned, apart from Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish who was asked about his acquaintance with the suspect. He answered that El-Wardani frequently visited the offices of *Al-Liwa* newspaper and the Nationalist Party Club, but that, to his knowledge, he was not a party member."

Evidence found in the defendant's home seemed to point in another direction. Police discovered a copy of the charter of an association called the Fraternal Solidarity Society. Although the charter was similar to the charters of charity societies, investigators were arrested by the stipulation, "Every applicant is obliged to draw up his will as a condition of admittance to the society." When questioned on the significance of this article, El-Wardani answered that the society was purely a finance company and that its charter had been published in several newspapers. The company, he said, undertook the funerary costs of its members and therefore made that stipulation. Investigators were not convinced, particularly as the accused "denied the involvement of the society in politics, yet refused to reveal any of the names of its members, to whom he refers in his personal papers in code." Eventually, investigators discovered a letter from El-Wardani to Mohamed Effendi Murad, one of the members of the society. Murad was arrested immediately and, on the basis of his interrogation, the public prosecutor determined that "this secret society does exist and its aim is to subvert the constitution by any means including murder and assassination. It has no connection whatsoever to the Egyptian Nationalist Party."

Over the following days, *Al-Ahram* provided readers with further details on the Fraternal Solidarity Society, although the reticence of investigators to reveal information prevented the newspaper from sating even its own curiosity. The police took 17 members of the society into custody. However, they were soon released, firstly because investigators were unable to establish its intention of overthrowing the government and, secondly, because until that point Egyptian law contained no penalties for founding a secret society. *Al-Ahram* informed its readers that the government was in the process of formulating such a law.

Al-Ahram was afraid that the assassination and subsequent trial of El-Wardani would open the door to religious dissension. Already some short-sighted people had expressed a malicious glee at the assassination of the Coptic prime minister. The newspaper was quick to point out that El-Wardani, when asked his motives for committing the crime, never so much as mentioned the issue of religion. Rather, El-Wardani said that he assassinated Ghali "because he was a traitor."

Illustration: Makram Henein

Many were well aware that, were this case to spark religious strife, it would only play into the hands of the occupation authorities, who would use it to support their allegations that the nationalist movement was essentially fanatical. The editors of *Al-Ahram* were as apprehensive as anyone, and on 4 March 1910, under the headline, "Toward harmony", it cautioned Egypt's Copts "not to look toward the alleys and the back streets for people's opinions, but rather to accept the expressions of fidelity and brotherhood from the wise men of this nation. If the previous life of the victim of that murderous bullet cannot be restored or compensated, at least let it serve to solder the two communities of this nation into a healthy, solid whole for the sake and benefit of all."

Al-Ahram was delighted when a group of Muslims and Copts met and decided to send a joint delegation to the offices of all the Arabic newspapers in Cairo in order to urge them to "close the door to controversy on any subject that might distort the bond of unity that links the two communities together."

The trial of El-Wardani began on Thursday 21 April and ended on 11 June. Throughout this 50-day period, it was headline news in all Egyptian newspapers which registered a remarkable rise in circulation. As *Al-Ahram* wrote, "The market for newspapers is more active than ever these days, due to the general eagerness of the public to hear the latest news on the El-Wardani trial."

The trial itself lured a thong of curious onlookers.

The judge asked the defendant his name, age and place of residence, questions which he answered "in a weak and stammering voice". The judge then asked him to respond to the charges levelled against him and El-Wardani responded, "I will respond after my lawyers have spoken." The magistrate instructed the court clerk to note that the defendant did not respond. Next, the witnesses for the prosecution were brought in to testify. All gave similar accounts of the incident. In light of the testimony and El-Wardani's police confession, defence attorneys had few options.

At 4.00pm on Thursday 12 May, Prosecutor Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat began his summation which, as was reported in *Al-Ahram*, sought to "refute the defence claims aimed at absolving the accused of responsibility for his actions and lessening the gravity of his crime." The defence, in its summation, continued to press its case.

At 7.35pm the following day, the court rejected the motion of the defence to refer the defendant to a medical committee to determine his state of mind and decided to hand his papers over to the Mufti of Egypt — a sure sign of a death sentence. Then, at 9.00am on Wednesday 18 May, in a session which very few spectators were permitted to attend, the court pronounced its verdict: "that Ibrahim Nasef El-Wardani has been found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging." On 11 June, the Court of Cassation upheld the verdict, and, on 28 June the sentence was carried out.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business

Ideal offers new refrigerators

IDEAL Co has placed its new 9-foot refrigerator on the market, which operates on a new type of environmentally-safe gas, in accordance to the Montreal environmental agreement to which Egypt is a signatory country.

Eng. Mustafa Shahba, deputy member of the board of Ideal, said that the company is always keen to take advantage of the latest scientific developments. Doing so was what helped Ideal acquire the ISO 9002 certificate of quality.

Other products of the company include full-automatic washing machines and dishwashers. The company will participate in the Egyptian Products Exhibition in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Gulf Investment general assembly

GULF Investment Co held a general assembly on 2 November 1997 to discuss company business during the course of the past fiscal year ending 30 June 1997.

The assembly agreed to distribute its profits to shareholders, by increasing its paid-up capital by 6 per cent. Profits realised over the last year reached a large percentage, gaining US$7 million.

A new board of directors was also elected, the members of which are expected to develop the company during the forthcoming stage in order to become a leading company in the field of investment in Egypt.

NBE's library on the threshold of the 21st century

IN LINE with the National Bank of Egypt's (NBE) endeavours titled towards modernising and equipping the Bank with state-of-the-art computer technologies and up-to-date techniques of the Information Revolution, the management has decided to break through to the 21st century with a library depending basically on an advanced database and sound information system.

Developing and modernising NBE's library, first inaugurated with the establishment of NBE in 1898, come as a top priority since it is one of Egypt's premier libraries specialised in economy, finance and banking. Since then, the library has contributed to enriching banking scientific research with more than 5,500 Arabic and English books covering all fields of economy, finance and banking. Moreover, the library has about 150 specialised periodicals in addition to reports of local and international economic and banking institutions. This is not only a great help to NBE's staff, but also to researchers and scholars of both Egypt and the Arab countries.

To develop the library, NBE has adopted a 10 month plan during which computer technology was applied with a view to establishing a database of the library's contents by using a CDS/ISIS programme package. This UNESCO-designed library automatic system guarantees a speedy and smooth search for any source in the library. It also contributes to introducing new services.

The management of NBE has crowned this modernisation process by introducing the Internet service which is considered the culmination of the information and technology evolution. This, in turn, makes it possible to domestically and internationally link the library with information and scientific research centres, universities and specialised libraries. This is a new contribution by NBE which provides the latest electronic research exchange and acquaintance with the latest developments in the banking industry, a far fetched idea before introducing the said system.

In pursuing the illuminating and cultural role that NBE assumed since its establishment, the management has decided to dedicate some books to other libraries to provide researchers and scholars with research materials.

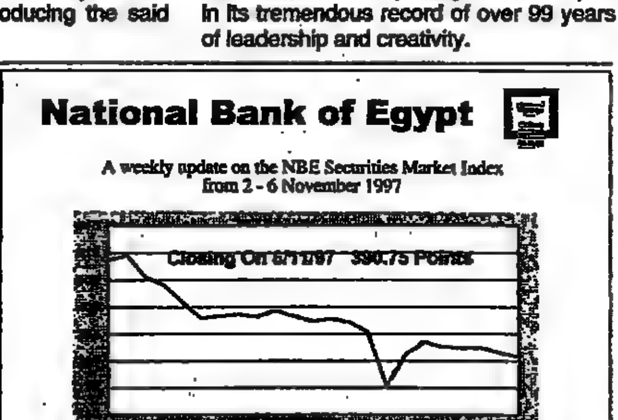
To complete its role in encouraging scientific research in economy and banking fields, NBE's library has announced its annual Research Competition. Such a step aims at promoting scientific research amongst junior staff and capitalising on their ideas, along with making available the use of the library's valuable books.

NBE's management intends to introduce other development mechanisms such as multimedia and advanced information storage systems, e.g. CD-ROM, since most international economic institutions and organisations now prefer electronic media to printed forms in issuing their reports, a matter that helps researchers in gaining speedy access to information.

With such a cultural, pivotal and sustainable role, NBE is opening a new chapter in its tremendous record of over 99 years of leadership and creativity.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 2 - 6 November 1997



The NBE Index has decreased 2.8 points to register 390.75 points for the week ending 6/11/1997 against 393.55 points for the previous week ending 30/10/1997.

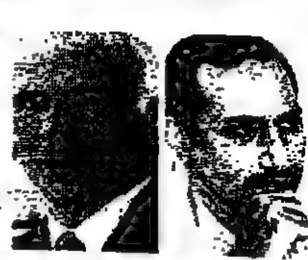
4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %	Company	Change %
Extracted Oils Co.	-8	Kabo Co.	+4.6
Suez Canal Bank	-5	Nile Pharmaceutical Co.	+3.9
Kafr El-Zayyat Pesticides Co.	-3.7	Alexandria Cement Co.	+2.6
Suez Cement Co.	-2.9	Egyptian-American Bank	+1.5

Egyptian contemporary artists on the Internet

IN ACCORDANCE with Shell Egypt's policy of supporting the Egyptian society, especially cultural and artistic activities, Shell Egypt, whose board of directors is led by chairman Roger Patey, is supporting a pioneering project which is a free service for Egyptian contemporary artists. This project is to post examples of those artist's work on the Internet to acquaint the world with Egyptian contemporary art and help market the artists' work internationally.

Fifteen artists' works have already been posted on the Internet and another ten are on their way. Shell Egypt hopes that by the end of 1998, examples of all contemporary Egyptian artists will be posted. Whoever would like to post his/her work on the Internet should call Mr. Amr El-Bilassy at Shell Egypt, tel. 2904111 or 2920714. The address of the site on the Internet is http://www.egyptart.org.eg



Roger Patey Amr El-Bilassy

ACITEX 1998 to display the latest from SYSTEM 1997

IN VIEW of the strong relations between Al-Ahram Establishment and the German Exhibition Authority in Munich, a special pavilion for Al-Ahram Establishment was opened to display Al-Ahram's publications and to likewise promote the 6th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX), to be held from 18-21 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre. Al-Ahram's pavilion attracted a number of visitors, especially managers of exhibiting companies at SYSTEMS who are interested in participating in ACITEX, an important exhibition which continues to grow year after year.



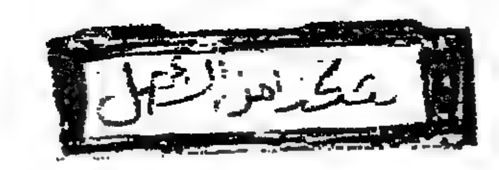
Joachim Enßlin Mr Keik

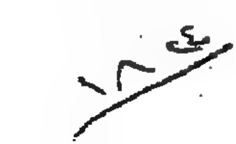


The new Munich Exhibition Grounds

It is worth mentioning that cooperation between ACITEX and SYSTEMS has resulted in the increased success of both exhibitions, increasing activity in the computer, data technology and Internet fields.

Dr Joachim Enßlin, general manager of Munich Exhibitions, and Mr Keik, executive manager of the Munich Exhibitions, are making preparations to transfer the Munich fair to a new location at the beginning of 1998. The new location will be distinguished by suitable facilities and more halls to accommodate the increasing amount of exhibitors and visitors.





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National Bank of Egypt

rtists on the Intern

from SYSTEM

Not just day trippers

SINCE declaring Saint Catherine a protected area, plans are under way to cope with the anticipated tourist activity while safeguarding the sacred area.

John Grainger, Saint Catherine Protectorate Project manager, has been assigned the task of balancing economic growth while easing the burden on the monastery. "I intend to develop Saint Catherine from just a one-day trip for Sinai visitors into a spa town destination. However, hotel growth will be limited to about 2,000 beds over the next five years," he said.

To relieve pressure on the monastery, Grainger hopes to promote tourist activities like hiking and self-guided nature trails and plans for cultural centres focusing on Bedouin and monastery life are also under consideration.

Sinai campaigns

AFTER the success of Sinai's '97 promotional campaign "Come and see for yourself", held early this year by hotel and tourist village owners to promote Sinai, the campaign will be extended to cover 1998 under the slogan: "Sinai '98 — the Jewel".

"We did a great deal in 1997, including participation in international trade fairs, advertising in the media, organising road shows to five Swiss cities, as well as hosting a festival in Sharm El-Sheikh last April to mark Sinai independence day. Now we are planning to launch a Website for Sinai on the Internet," said Hoda Armanazi, a member of the campaign committee.

Bird hospitality

MOST of the birds that stop over in Sinai suffer from migratory stress, dehydration and malnutrition. Some have been hit by vehicles, electrocuted or injured by humans.

In order to preserve Sinai's wealth of birds, hotels on the Sinai coast are lending a hand in protecting rare species by providing food and water for the White Stork Clinic of the Sinai Wildlife Project, a non-profit organisation which works in cooperation with governmental environment agencies.

Charter facilities

IN ORDER to facilitate the arrival of passengers on charter flights, a $10 million upgrading project has started at Hurghada airport. This will cover the existing passenger hall, tarmac on the runways, and expansion of the terminals. The old terminals will be used for domestic flights, the new one for charters.

$3.34 million has also been allocated for a new arrivals and departure hall at Sharm El-Sheikh airport which will be equipped to double its current capacity of 1,200 passengers per hour.

Training makes perfect

WITH the growing demand for improved tourist services, the Egyptian Federation of Tourism Chambers has drawn up a proposal for an $8 million training programme for tourist-related jobs. Fifteen per cent of the costs will be met by the Ministry of Tourism, 75 percent by the Social Fund for Development, and 10 percent by the Egyptian Tourism Chamber Federation.

There is already a national campaign in progress which involves all three-star hotels and above in Egypt, and about 100,000 people ranging from cooks to waiters are to be trained over the next five years.

British promotion

A SPONSORED mission of the British Tourist Authority (BTA) and British Airways, comprising 10 top travel and educational organisations, visited Egypt early this month on the first leg of a three-country promotional tour of North Africa including Tunisia and Morocco.

The mission to Cairo was part of an ongoing series of joint promotions between the BTA and its key partners in the Middle East to boost Britain's profile as a major overseas destination for tourism and education.

A workshop for local travel agents was held during the mission's two-day visit to Cairo, besides meetings with members of the Egyptian media, government and local business community. "I believe that our promotional visit will help to strengthen and develop tourism links between Britain and Egypt," said Mohamed Mansour, BTA Middle East marketing and media relations representative.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



Wall strata and restoration dilemmas

Early Coptic wall paintings, lying beneath layers of stucco in some early churches and deteriorating rapidly in others, were the focus of a recent restoration workshop. Jill Kamil attended

Restoration at Deir El-Naqlun revealed a window-grill beneath a layer of plaster

photos: Sami Boushra

Research on early Coptic panel icons and wall paintings has been in progress since the early 1990s, but the study is still in its infancy and the significance of these works of art is only now coming to light. "Early archaeologists showed no interest in Christian antiquities. They either ignored them and left them to suffer the affects of time, or removed them from temple walls with little or no documentation or photographs," said Coptologist Gawdat Gabra, presiding over a discussion panel at a workshop sponsored by the Polish, Netherlands and French Institutes of Archaeology in Cairo early this month. "What remains is very fragile and for that reason more attention needs to be given, and quickly, to their conservation."

Recent years have seen a revival in the monastic movement in Egypt, and churches all over the country are being rebuilt, expanded or renovated, their icons cleaned and restored, wall paintings coming to light beneath layers of stucco. The illustrated lectures at the workshop focused on the wall paintings being restored at three monasteries: Deir El-Naqlun in the Fayoum, Deir El-Suryan in Wadi Natrun, and Saint Antony's Monastery near the Red Sea coast. Each one giving rise to interesting restoration dilemmas.

At Deir El-Naqlun, for example, the church of the Archangel Gabriel had suffered from the ravages of time. Constructed in the ninth or early tenth century and totally rebuilt at the beginning of the twentieth, the walls were plastered and whatever remained of any ancient paintings covered.

When a team from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo and the National Museum, Warsaw, first visited the monastery with a view to its restoration in 1991, patches of painting were scaling off the disintegrating brick walls, the leaking roof was causing further damage. The monastery, guarded by a single monk, seldom saw visitors. Now, following restoration and conservation, attention has been drawn to the site and Deir El-Naqlun has once again become a pilgrimage site. Busloads of people head there on weekends and religious holidays, individuals drive from the Fayoum, and it has become extremely difficult to continue work in such conditions, the stream of visitors hampering restoration work.

The influx of visitors is, of course, not surprising. Churches in Egypt are built, as is not always the case in other parts of the world, as places where the community of faithful can gather for thanksgiving and prayer; they are places where honour is be paid to a relic, icon or wall painting of a holy person, saint or martyr. The pictures are objects of devotion, Copts believing that they represent the presence of living souls whom they regard as models of the ideal Christian life and paying homage to them is to bring blessing on themselves.

"When early Christians entered a church they touched pictures of holy people and consequently the works had to be constantly retouched or restored as a result of the damage," commented Karel Innemee of Leiden University.

One can therefore appreciate the interest generated when the dazzling paintings came to light in Naqlun, but the problem now is how best to maintain them in their present condition and safeguard them from further damage by an adoring populace.

Another problem faced by restorers is how to deal with the ethics of conservation when layer upon layer of paintings (sometimes as many as five) have been found superimposed one on top of the other, their presence revealed only when parts of the stucco had fallen, or when "windows" (parts of unpainted plaster which are removed in places in order to see what is beneath) reveal their presence. In other words, are restorers justified in removing an outer, damaged, painting in order to reveal an earlier, questionably more intact and valuable, painting beneath?

Since wall paintings and icons serve a sacred function in the Coptic church, they have to be pure and beautiful. Monks themselves often "refreshed" their sacred pictures; in other cases an older, damaged scene might be covered with stucco and repainted. But as Innemee commented, this practice makes the identification and dating of the paintings very time consuming.

Copts naturally wanted to see the original Coptic paintings, painted before Syrian monks inhabited the monastery and decorated the church, brought to the surface. But that would have meant the destruction of a great work of art, including a composition of the Annunciation and the Nativity which experts assign to the tenth century and claim is one of the most beautiful paintings in Egypt, and could not be justified.

Nature intervened, however, in the form of the October 1992 earthquake which damaged parts of the ancient church, and threatened the dome with collapse. A Netherlands/Polish team was granted permission to reinforce it, and what they have achieved is a brilliant combination of conservation, restoration and discovery. The outer painting has been removed, treated, and placed on a supporting frame at the side of the church, while the striking quality of the revealed earlier painting has now come to light. The Holy Virgin appears with the Archangel Gabriel and the prophets Isiah, Moses, Izekiel and Daniel, each carrying a slab with a prophecy about the Annunciation and the virginity of Saint Mary.

The approach to restoration in the Monastery of Saint Antony is different. Founded in the fourth century, a few years after the death of the saint, it had an uncertain history until the twelfth century when the church of Saint Antony was restored and adorned with specially commissioned works of art.

"Our aim is to restore the last layer in the ancient church only," said Father Maximos El-Antony. "It is almost intact and very well preserved so conservationists [in a partnership grant by USAID] are concentrating on cleaning and retouching in only a very limited way," he said.

During the panel discussion, disagreement arose concerning the study of restoration itself. "A single monk in each monastery [should be chosen] to study the conservation of wall paintings for three or four years abroad in order to undertake responsibility for their protection on their return," said Gabra, a suggestion with which neither Parandowska nor Innemee agreed.

"The wall paintings are here, in Egypt. We must spread out knowledge from this base," said Parandowska.

"Direct sources of information lie here, in Egypt, not in Europe," said Innemee; "If new wall paintings are found, the people who have to deal with questions of identification and dating have to go to the sites, themselves."

"True," responded Gabra. "But we still need Egyptians who have had the advantages of higher study to appreciate the wealth of our Coptic heritage. I agree that studies have to be carried out on the spot, but Egyptians have to have the training to appreciate what they are looking at, as well as the know-how of conservation."



Early Christian treasures unearthed in Fayoum

Magnificent wall paintings, valuable texts and more have come to light in the Naqlun area south of Fayoum, as Sherine Nasr discovered

Excavations in the Naqlun Desert, together with restoration work at Naqlun's church of the Archangel Gabriel and other chance discoveries, have cast considerable light on the early Christian movement. The area is unique, not only because of its location in a barren strip of desert between two fertile areas — the Fayoum depression to the west and the Nile Valley to the east — but in historical importance as well.

"Much attention has recently been drawn to Naqlun by people interested in Coptic heritage," said Professor W. Godlewski, director of the Polish team of excavators and restorers working there.

A monastery next to the church was founded in the fourth century and was used as a place of refuge by hermits as long ago as the fifth century. "Saint Antony himself, the founder of monasticism, set rules to be followed by the monks of Deir El-Naqlun," said Father You'el, one of the monks at the monastery, who welcomes the interest generated by the work being carried out in the area.





Paintings of Saint Pachom (right) and St Pichoshe of Fayoum (left) are among the most well-preserved in the church of the Archangel Gabriel

Beautiful wall paintings have been discovered in the recently restored main church. The paintings can be dated precisely to the period between 1025 and 1033. "Commemoration of the event is recorded in Coptic on the main altar which also reveals the name of the painter himself and the fact that he was paid for the work," said Godlewski.

The wall paintings are remarkable. In a huge representation on the left-hand side of the church the Archangel Gabriel is dressed "in the same fashion as that of Caesar," said Godlewski. He stands between two horse-riding knights, St Mercurius, better known among Copts as Abu Seifein ("the one with the two swords") and St Georgeous Theodore, a Greek soldier martyr.

The main altar in the church is also adorned with partly restored paintings. The central apse had a large window with a stucco grille above, in which Jesus is represented in glory and, on both sides of the grille, stand six apostles. "The discovery is unique. This is the only window grille that goes back to the 11th century and it occupies the place traditionally reserved for a representation of the Virgin Mary and child," said Godlewski. As work continued, however, the painting of the Virgin was found, beneath the grille, placed between two of the most important figures in Christianity: St Mark the Evangelist who introduced the new creed to Egypt, and St Athanasius, defender of the faith.

These and other wall paintings have been revealed beneath layers of plaster and they help place the works, and hence the church, in historical context. It was constructed some time between the seventh and ninth centuries, yet Godlewski believes that an earlier church may lie beneath it. "There are more than 100 architectural elements in the structure to support this suggestion," he said. Among these are traces of columns and capitals in various parts of the walls. "During the fifth century capitals were used to indicate windows above. Later these windows were filled with bricks," Godlewski explained.

Other recently revealed paintings include one of the Virgin Mary and child seated on a *mashrabiya*-decorated throne. "This is typical of Egyptian art," said Godlewski. There are also well-preserved paintings of Jesus Christ, and Saint Pichoshe of Fayoum. The former represents a young Christ at the centre of a cross surrounded by a rainbow, the latter recounts the life of the martyr whose biography is recorded in Coptic texts in both the British Museum and the Louvre.

An unusual painting is one of a woman standing between two monks, one of which is the famous St Simon Stylite, the other anonymous. "We know from history books that two or three women spent their lives in solitude here in the fourth century. This discovery is unique in that it is perhaps the only one to portray a woman standing between two monks," commented Godlewski.

Outside the church other discoveries have been made. The preserved bodies of monks were unearthed while digging to the south-west of the monastery. "The discovery was mere chance. We were planning a sewage recycle system when the bodies were dug up," said father You'el. "They were found wearing traditional monk's robes and are now in a glass reliquary in a room next to the main church."

A 20-minute walk up the hills to the east of the monastery takes a visitor to a number of rock-hewn hermitages. This area was sought by early hermits as a place of refuge where they lived in solitude. "So far, we have identified 89 hermitages. Others are expected to be found later," said Godlewski.

Each hermitage consisted of two rooms, a living room and a bedroom in front of which there is a courtyard and a kitchen. "The hermitage was the dwelling of two monks. We found elements of everyday life including pottery for kitchen use, and plates for serving food, some of which were imported from Cyprus and Tunisia," said Godlewski. Among the other items found were fragments of glass lamps, pottery for transporting oil and wine on which the name of the sender was engraved.

While excavating near the monastery, a large collection of texts was found in a leather bag inside a big pot. They belonged to a man called Georgi who, together with his two sons, bought large areas of land around the monastery. "These archives are extremely important to the history of Fayoum because of the contracts showing who owned how much land and over what period of time," said Godlewski. "The documents, which date to 1020, describe the borders of the plots and the sums paid." Other texts relate to the lending of money.

Valuable texts had earlier been found in the region. The most famous was discovered in 1986 when the Polish team found a leaf of parchment in Latin on which part of chapter 11 of Livius' *History of Rome* was recorded. "This is a famous book of the first century and it is the only fragment of chapter 11 that has been preserved world-wide," said Godlewski. In 1990, the team found a casket book that was produced in Sicily in the 12th century decorated with ivory engravings of birds and other elements in gold. "This was another unique discovery because it is the only one ever found in Egypt. In fact, very few caskets of the sort have survived, and they are in the British Museum," Godlewski said. The new discovery is now on display in the Islamic Museum.

These findings and others have placed Naqlun firmly on the map of Egypt. It is fast becoming a famous archaeological site. So far, over 1,000 texts have been found.

"A well-educated Coptic community dwelled here and they produced a considerable amount of literature," Godlewski said. "There was a large number of monks whose main activity was to read and transcribe texts, which is another reason why the area is so rich in documents," he added. "We are fortunate to have found so many. They will undoubtedly yield valuable information when studied in depth."

هكذا من الأصل

Jolly hockey sticks

Due to last-minute withdrawals, the planned friendly tournament to celebrate the new covered pitch at Cairo Stadium was more like a private teach-in. **Abeer Anwar** watched the clash of sticks that turned into a meeting of minds



Egyptian players running in conflict for ball with the English players — photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Dr Abdel-Moneim Emara, executive manager of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, this week presided over the inauguration of the large new covered hockey stadium at the Cairo Stadium Complex. The biggest of its kind in Africa, it cost LE2.5 million to build. "With its vast facilities, this new stadium gives us the chance to host a number of international events and to make our bid to host the World Cup," said Dr Emara.

"We were slipping and sliding when we played on the old pitch, but now we can play easily," commented David Whittle, manager of the English national team.

To mark the occasion, the Egyptian Hockey Federation (EHF) decided to invite a number of countries, including England, India, South Africa, Germany and Poland, for a friendly tournament. "We wanted to hold Egypt's First International Championship on the new pitch," explained Mahmoud Barakat, head of the EHF. But a lot of countries were obliged to withdraw due to financial reasons, and in the end the only team that showed up was good old reliable England. Since they are ranked fourth in the world, they may also have reckoned *there might be something in* it for them. In any case, it proved a good opportunity for Egypt to get some international experience in a relaxed setting. Gad, the coach, took advantage of the chance to experiment by including a number of junior players in the squad.

In all six matches against their English opponents, the Egyptians were the losers: 3-1, 3-1, 3-2, 6-3, 6-3, 3-2. But they were still doing their best, considering Egypt does not have an international ranking, and the *players showed both talent* and technical skill. If the English came expecting an easy ride, they were disappointed. "Today's Egyptian team is very different from that of two years ago," said Whittle. "We came here in '95, and the *Egyptians were not very* convincing. But this time we have played them six times in two weeks and I feel that their team is developing from day to day."

The Egyptians are certainly much more internationally hockey-aware now than they were before. "*The players are better and* they are more controlled. They used to be more aggressive but now they are *thinking more,*" added Whittle, as witness to their narrow 3-2 defeat in one of the matches. As for the future of hockey *in* Egypt, Whittle commented: "I think the future looks great, not only because they have got this marvellous facility, this pitch, which is one of the best surfaces in the world and worthy to be used for the World Cup. The weather is also lovely, and they have lovely hotels. I think Egypt and this place will be a centre of attraction for many other countries who will come to play tournaments here."

England's national team comprises the best 18 players in the country, and is *one of the strongest in* the world. For them, their matches against Egypt are simply the first step in preparing *for the World Cup* that will be held in Holland next June. England has a total of 950 hockey pitches *scattered across the country,* while in Egypt, there are only two. Berry Dancer, the new technical manager of the English team, gave a seminar for the Egyptian coaches on the latest training methods and tactics that are being used all over the world. "*I think this will* improve the standard of hockey in Egypt," commented Assem Gad. In addition, Barakat explained, "holding friendly matches with strong European teams such as England will develop the standard of hockey in Egypt, as the players *will come* into contact with different techniques and even play against former and present world champions."

Hockey has really started to take off in Egypt over the past few years. The na*tional team won the Med*iterranean Games, beating such strong countries as Spain and Italy, even though this was the first time it took part in such a competition. In addition, the juniors came ninth in the under-21 World Cup. *Egypt is now likely to take* part in the World Cup in 2002. In the meantime, they are preparing for the African Nations Cup that will be held in Zimbabwe next year and for the All-Africa Games scheduled for 1999 in South Africa.



A lift to Thailand

Egypt will be sending eight men and three women to strut their stuff at the World Weightlifting Championships from 2 to 16 December in Thailand. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** powders her hands and gets down to business

For the first time in Egyptian history, the national team will be sending three women, as well as a full complement of men, to an international competition. Yet their ambitions for the women remain modest, despite the understandable excitement surrounding their debut on the world stage. According to Gameel Hanna, director of the Egyptian Weightlifting Federation, "if one of the women lifters manages *to take even a single medal,* it will be a remarkable achievement."

As for the eight men, who are no strangers to the World Championship, Gameel said: "If they succeed in being placed among the top ten in the teams event, that will be considered another good achievement." Although their best World Championship result to date was 16th place in 1994, new coach Reda El-Batuti believes they still have a strong chance of glory. Not only are the new recruits young, but they have already earned themselves two titles — one at the Arab tournament held in Beirut in July, and one at the African Championships *held in Egypt in April. Some of the members* of the team were also responsible for Egypt's third place in the World Junior Championship held last year. The current team comprises Ali *Hemid* weighing 54kg, Mohamed Osman 59kg, Yousri Shalali 64kg, Rafat Galal 76kg, Naser Adel 83kg, Naser Helal and Khaled Koramy 91kg each, and Tharwat El-Bendary weighing 99kg. Unfortunately Ahmed Samir, a promising young weightlifter weighing 70kg, has to undergo an operation at the time of the World Championship, and thus will not be able to join the team in Thailand.

After a busy year for local competitions, only three women out of 80 were selected by federation officials and coach El-Batuti to accompany the men's team on their journey to Thailand. *The federation first* formed a women's national team two years ago to participate in international competitions, with the aim of raising the number of medals they might potentially win in the Arab and African championships. In the long run, the federation plans to have a full women's team in place in time for the Sydney Olympics — the first Olympic Games ever to stage a women's weightlifting event. The Egyptian women made their World Junior Championship debut in 1996, when they were placed 11th, and in '97 they came seventh. Their best result to date has been Heba Samir's two bronze medals. Hanna, however, does not *expect* any of the women to win a medal in their Senior World Championship debut. The three girls going to the World Championship are Nagwan El-Zawawi weighing 70kg, and Rabab Ashour and Sabrin Kamel both 50kg. *Heba Samir* will not be present, as she *is still too young.*

From the 20s through the 40s, Egypt could pride itself on its Olympic weightlifting champions. The Egyptian federation clearly hope they may be able to revive those golden days, but many experts believe that *our chances* of coming in *the first* ten places this year are quite weak.

Starting next year, the International Weightlifting Federation will have a new set of weight categories. After the Olympic Committee approved a women's weightlifting event *for the first time* in history, they went on to demand that the number of weight categories be reduced to 15 (eight for men, and seven for women) instead of 19 (ten for men and nine for women). *It is* expected this change will give our players an even better opportunity to carry off more medals than ever before.



Zamalek's player fighting for the ball with one of Gold Field's players — photo: Amr Gamal

Zamalek out of Africa

Zamalek failed to qualify for the semi-finals of the African League Champions Championship, though the players still returned home with $12,000

Four-time African League Champions *Championship title-holders,* Zamalek, failed to qualify for this year's semi-finals, **Abeer Anwar** reports. In their final match, they beat Gold Field of Ghana 2-0, but by then *it was too* late to take *revenge.* Gold Field had already qualified having gone top of their group with 10 points, and Zamalek were already eliminated.

In fact, the two teams were reluctant to play at all, for fear of possible injuries or suspensions. The team Zamalek fielded was 100 per cent juniors, and they treated the match as a *trial* for the next two big *fixtures on their* programme: Arab Contractors in the national league, and the Korean team Yuhang who they are to meet in the finals of the Afro-Asian Championship.

But in spite of having *lost all* hope of qualifying, Zamalek still hoped they might get *one back over* Gold Field, *after losing* to the Ghanaians in their previous encounter. Despite their youth, they gave a good account of themselves. In the first *half,* Zamalek *were mainly in control and* Essam Marei, one of the few senior players on the pitch, scored the first goal after 35 minutes. Gold Field responded by *throwing themselves into attack, but in* vain. Twenty-four minutes into the second half, man of the match Mohamed Sabri, scored the second goal and wrapped things up *for* Zamalek. *Gold Field* again reacted by pulling out all the stops in an attempt to save face, if nothing else, but it was no use, and the final whistle blew without them having anything to show for all their efforts.

The home players were happy, having exacted their *revenge and at the same time* won $12,000 according to the new CAF regulations for teams eliminated in the quarter-finals. So the losers were also win*ners in a small* way. As for Ruud Kroll, Zamalek's technical manager, he commented: "We failed to qualify for the semi-finals of the championship and maybe win the title *for the fifth time, but not* because Zamalek are a lesser team than Gold Field. On the contrary, our problem was that the quarter-finals came round just *as Zamalek* were beginning to train with me, and I did not have time to reorganise the team fully as I want to." According to Kroll, if the matches had fallen only a little later in the season, Zamalek would have *qualified* easily.



One to go

EVANDER Holyfield avenged the most bitter defeat of his career to date by crushing Michael Moorer, and putting himself only one fight away from reclaiming his crown as undisputed world heavyweight champion.

Holyfield, who lost to Moorer three and a half years ago, knocked his *southpaw* adversary down *five times* in a wild heavyweight title fight to defend his World Boxing Association title and claim Moorer's International Boxing Federation crown.

"He came to win," said Holyfield, "when a guy comes to win it's always going to be a good fight."

Moorer was valiant under tremendous pressure from Holyfield, but he held his own until he was knocked down for the first time in the fifth round. Holyfield then knocked him down twice in the seventh round and twice more in the eighth. "I was going to keep getting up," Moorer said. But ring doctor Flip Homansky wouldn't let Moorer try. "Every time he got knocked down he got up and answered my questions," Halpern said. "*The last time* he did *not answer my question.*"

However, World Boxing Council champion Lennox Lewis remained unimpressed after watching Holyfield clear a path for the two to meet for an undisputed world heavyweight title challenge. "Evander is there for the taking," Lewis said. "I don't think he is ready for Lennox Lewis yet." And he added: "it was a so-so fight, mediocre. *I still say [I'll beat Holyfield in] three rounds.*"

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Kings (and queens) of speed

FOR THE 12th consecutive time, it was Egypt who won *the World Speedball Championship,* this year snatching 19 gold medals and one silver. France, Austria, the United States, Japan, Slovenia, Nigeria, Italy, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Congo Brazzaville and Indonesia all participated in the championship that was hosted by *El-Zohour Club. Egypt took first place* in both women's and men's singles, doubles and fours and also in the mixed-fours event.

Awesome Kenyans

THE KENYAN women's volleyball team easily carried off the African Nations Cup in Maputo in Mozambique, winning all their matches. They beat Mozambique, Angola, Nigeria and South Africa with the same *staggering* result *each time: 13-0 in every set.* The Kenyan team are clearly head and shoulders above every other team in Africa nowadays. Even the supposedly strong South African team only lasted 45 minutes against them. Last year, the Egyptian women's team won *the championship,* beating *their Kenyan counterparts* 3-2. However, for reasons that remain unclear, there was no Egyptian team taking part in the competition this year.

Odai off the hook

THE GOVERNING body of world soccer has cleared Iraq of charges that the national soccer squad were punished by being physically beaten after their elimination from the World Cup qualifying rounds. A FIFA inquiry into alleged mistreatment within the Iraqi Soccer Federation has found no evidence to support the accusations. FIFA ordered the *investigation late July after reports* that Odai Hussein, Saddam's feared eldest son and the head of the Federation, had ordered the team to be punished after it had lost to Kazakhstan thus forfeiting its place in next year's World *Cup finals in* France. *Two experts from Malaysia* and Qatar, sent to verify the reports, questioned soccer federation officials and the team coach. They also interviewed and physically examined 12 players for any *sign of mistreatment. Iraq dismissed the charges as* "fabricated stories aiming at harming the reputation of the president's son".

Boxer shot in Banja Luka

A FORMER Yugoslav boxing champion, Antun Josipovic, who received a controversial gold medal in the 1984 Olympics, was shot and seriously injured last week in the Bosnian Serb *town of* Banja Luka. An unknown assailant approached Josipovic while he was sitting in a café and shot him twice in the chest. Josipovic, a Bosnian Croat now living in Croatia, had arrived in Banja Luka for an exhibition match a day earlier. *It was his second visit to the* northern Bosnia town. During the wars that ripped the former Yugoslavia apart, such a visit would have been unthinkable. But two years after the Dayton Accords, sports and other friendly exchanges between Serbs, Croats and *Muslims have been increasing.*

EU in Ouagadougou

EUROPEAN match officials will participate in the African Nations Cup for the first time next February when Burkina Faso hosts the biennial tournament. Danish referee Milto Nielsen and English assistant (linesman) Mark Warren are among a 32-strong group named by the African Football Confederation (CAF) for the three-week event. Their inclusion follows an agreement signed in Portugal this year between CAF and its European counterpart UEFA to strengthen cooperation in various areas of the game.

Toxic games

TOXIC chemicals and heavy metals may be present on the site chosen to house 6,000 media representatives during the Sydney 2000 Olympics. The news is a further setback for Sydney Olympic authorities who have already been forced to spend 21 million Australian dollars cleaning up dioxin pollution at Homebush Bay, near the Olympic site. Dioxin is a highly toxic chemical which was produced as a *byproduct of the weedkiller 245-T, once commonly* used but later linked with birth defects, miscarriages and cancer. The investigations, compiled by independent environmental consultancies for the Olympic Coordination Authority (OCA), conclude that the potential for unacceptable health risks *is "low and effectively negligible". The site where* a temporary village will be constructed to house the reporters had been used for burial of spent boiler ash waste from incinerators, as well as housing underground fuel tanks, *flammable liquid stores and two rubbish tips. Radioactive* waste stored in an old air-raid shelter nearby had already been cleaned up.

Rally death

THE FORMER chief of the Adelaide Formula One Grand Prix, Ian Cocks, died in a rally when his 1967 Porsche hit a tree. Cocks' 19-year-old daughter Chantal was his co-driver *and suffered serious burns, requiring skin grafts,* after the car burst into flames immediately on impact. Dean Rainsford, organiser of the Adelaide Classic Rally for pre-1970 cars, described the crash as an unlucky accident, *adding that it was in the nature of the sport for there to be* an element of danger. The four-day event covered a 1,000km circuit. Cocks, chairman of the Adelaide Grand Prix in 1992 and 1993, died during a time trial.

Fawzi Mansour:

A heart's desire

Physician, you do not know...

An armchair revolutionary? Not quite. Few rode the wave of Egypt's socialist years more boldly than Fawzy Mansour, professor emeritus in the Faculty of Economics at Ain Shams University. At first, he hailed the 1952 July Revolution as a "panacea for all the country's ills." Little did he know that, barely seven years later, the very revolutionary leaders he had applauded so heartily would throw him in jail. But by then, he had become disillusioned with that revolution.

Mansour first experienced the pain of detention without trial in 1959. "There is no need to go into the details of why I was detained. I felt as if I had just escaped from death row. Sometimes, less often, it was like I was in exile. I made good friends in prison." He looks up at a couple of brightly coloured naive paintings on the walls of his spacious study. "These were painted by my friends in prison. Inmates painted on their prison uniforms. They had no canvas. Brushes and paint were smuggled in by relatives and friends." In retrospect, he sees his five-year stint in jail as a garish and confused moment in history.

Mansour's portrait by the late leftist artist, Inji Aflatoun, dominates the corner of the living room facing the terrace. It is an oil painting of great depth and bold colours. A youthful-looking Mansour stares out. One instinctively knows that Mansour displays his portrait on the wall of his living room more in deference to his close friend than out of pride or vanity. He cherishes her memory, and the painting is a reminder. A passionate Matisse and a sensual Gaugin hang respectively opposite and next to Aflatoun's Mansour.

His fellow inmates in the arid exile of long ago: "Nabil El-Hilali, Abdel-Azim Anis, Mahmoud Amin El-Alim, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, Sherif Hetata, Saad Kamel, and the younger ones — Son'allah Ibrahim and Abdel-Hakim Qassem among others." Whenever a name escapes his memory, he remembers his wife. "Gerda is my historical memory," Mansour muses half apologetically. The names he may have forgotten, but the faces and pain he remembers with surgical precision.

His wife accompanied him to the United States, where he underwent open-heart surgery — four times in two decades. Gerda Mansour is an Australian national of German extraction, an academic and Africanist in her own right. Mansour met Gerda in 1975 at a United Nations conference in New York. Gerda, a socio-linguist, lectured at Macquarie University in Australia. They were married early 1976 in Australia; she quit her job and followed Mansour to Egypt and Senegal. Her *Multilingualism and Nation-Building* is required reading in several African universities. Cultural differences enriched the Mansours' marriage. They have similar tastes in music and literature. "We both love classical Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian music and enjoy reading a good Doris Lessing novel. We are partial to Bertrand Russell, Edward Said and Eqbal Ahmad."

The poetry of Nazim Hikmat moves Mansour as no other can. He has only read Arabic translations of the leftist Turkish poet's works, but the poetry touched him nonetheless. "He is to Turkey what Pablo Neruda is to Latin America. He was imprisoned for 25 years by the Turkish military authorities."

One of Nazim Hikmat's poems, in particular, touches a raw nerve: it speaks of heart trouble — an illness that has dogged Mansour for much of his adult life. "It goes something like this: Physician, you do not know why my heart hurts. My heart hurts not because I smoke, or because of hypertension. My heart aches because it sees the moonlight filtering faintly through the prison bars. Because it sees the sunrays reflected in the bright blue sea far away, and the hungry street children." Mansour pauses briefly to catch his breath. "My heart feels the pain of factory workers and peasants in the fields. My love shines through the sombre prison walls, through the inpenetrable prison gates. Physician, it is not because I smoke that my heart hurts."

He is an emotional man. On doctors' orders, no Egyptian newspapers were allowed by his hospital bedside. "I get all worked up when I read them." But he also has the rigour and mental discipline of an academician. Mansour's books include *Political Economy for Developing Countries*; *The Price Theory: A Critical Study of Bourgeois Thought*; and *The International Economic Relations of Developing Countries*.

Mansour's most widely acclaimed work, *The Arabs' Exit From History*, has been translated into several languages. "I'm not sure it was a success. Reviewers focused on the last section, dealing with the future of Arabs and the Arab world. The first part, dealing with the development of Arab societies, which I feel is more significant, was largely ignored — except for a brilliant exposé by [French orientalist Jacques] Berque in *Le Monde*."

Rows of books line the shelves of his study. There is a large collection of Arabic language classics: Ibn Khaldoun, Ibn Iyas, Al-Tabari, Al-Maqrizi and Al-Jabarti. The complete works of Shakespeare, UNESCO's *General History of Africa*, J D Bernal's 1954 classic *Science in History* and his son Martin's *Black Athena* caught my eye. Hobsbaum's *The Rise of Capital* and *The Age of Revolution* are also there. Hobsbaum's recently released *The Age of Extremes* is the latest addition to this treasure trove.

Tropical plants grace the Mansours' south-facing terrace. "Gerda tends to the plants, I do not have the patience." The conversation quickly drifts away from the cheery sunlit terrace to darker subjects: agrarian reform and the exploitation of peasants. Mansour was critical of the first wave of agrarian reforms in 1952. "They were not radical enough," he explains. "Actually, Japan and Taiwan, which at the time were under American occupation and are determinedly capitalist-oriented, instituted far more radical and sweeping agrarian reforms. Ours simply did not go far enough. They were applied in a stiflingly bureaucratic manner and left bereft of any meaningful and long-lasting benefits."

Languishing in jails in the remote oases of the Western Desert, Mansour missed out on the years when more credible agrarian reforms were instituted, between 1961 and 1964.

Soon after his release from prison, Mansour landed a plum job. Ironically, in a strange twist of fate, he was assigned to politically educate the state's top officials, including some of his former interrogators. "Dr Ibrahim Saadeddin, the secretary-general of the Socialist Institute, asked me to join, and I did in 1965. The late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser had established the institute in order to train new socialist cadres. A few years after I joined, I was invited to head the institute and I took up the challenge and became its director."

Nasser, says Mansour, was blessed with a rare characteristic: "he was able to develop his thought and authority according to the aspirations of the people. He was a man of historical moment. When he first assumed office, his political ideas were blurred. By trial and error, his thinking became clearer. He was in a league of his own. But, because of our own society as well as his character, he could not create a revolutionary political organisation that could have propelled the revolution forward. When the extent of the rift between Nasser and his second-in-command [Field Marshall] Abdel-Hakim Amer became clear, we were all the more disillusioned. Then came the 1967 defeat — a terrible shock, a setback for us all."

Mansour's great-grandfather, Sid-Ahmed Mansour, left his large family in Mallawi, deep in Upper Egypt, and fled northwards to escape a vendetta. "I'm not sure what crime he was supposed to have committed," Mansour explains. After wandering from village to village, he finally settled in El-Shobek El-Gharbi, near El-Badrashain in Giza. He founded a new branch of the Mansour family — one that had practically no ties with Upper Egypt. "We were cut off from our roots," muses Mansour.

Mansour's grandfather, too, was an impetuous, determined man. Mohamed Mansour started out life as a man of the world with a knack for business. But he crashed in the ripple effects of the Great Depression of 24 October 1929. After he had lost his money, he devoted himself to the study of the Qur'an.

Fawzi Mansour, born in 1924 in El-Shobek, came to love his paternal grandfather as a pious and kind man, an untiring teacher and an exciting story-teller. "He instilled in me a love of reading and study. I was an assiduous student." His maternal grandfather was a small landowner. The respected religious leader of the village, he invariably led the people in prayer. Mansour's father — perhaps the embodiment of the transition from *'alim* to *effendi* — was a teacher at a secondary school.

Mansour left Egypt to pursue post-graduate studies in Britain. He was active in the student and anti-imperialist movements in Britain. He obtained a PhD from Edinburgh University. "On my return to Egypt, I joined the University of Alexandria as an economics lecturer. A year after my return, Nasser's revolution took place, and initially I was very enthusiastic." But his enthusiasm soon turned into disappointment. "Democracy fast eroded. Demands for freedom of association and expression were denied. Brutal worker repression escalated in the 1950s. I was opposed to foreign investment." The clash with authorities was inevitable.

Nor did the situation improve after the death of Nasser. "Many people were involved in the political conflict and tensions of the early '70s. It was at that crucial moment in Egypt's history that I left the country and went to Senegal. I joined the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning. I could not tolerate what was happening."

In Dakar, Mansour met Samir Amin. "He was a close friend and we spent long hours strolling along the Atlantic coastline. He never convinced me of the correctness of the Marxist theory of value, however — in spite of its centrality to Marxist thought." One can imagine the two men walking amicably along, locked in intellectual battle, almost oblivious to the crashing waves and the discomfort of wet shoes.

Twenty-odd years later, is revolution a closed chapter? An acutely intelligent man, Fawzi Mansour is not one to indulge in moments of nostalgia. The air is cooler, but Mansour gazes out of his portrait without reproach. His gaze, as clear as it ever was, remains steady and passionate. "It's gone so far the other way." It is a statement, nothing more. "I regret nothing. I couldn't have done it any other way."



photo: Randa Shaath

Profile by Gamal Nkrumah

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♦ This week my darlings I went on an extended tour of my most favourite city in the world, Fatimid Cairo, and lost myself there for hours. Exhausted –and feeling rather peckish –I decided to rest my poor aching feet and stopped for a drop of something and a nibble at the Khan Khalil Restaurant. Well dears, when I was presented with their "historic" menu, food and drink suddenly lost their interest. My good friend **Maged Farag**, who conceived and designed the menu, a thick 12 pages affair, full of pictures from his private collection, did such a good job, that poring over the old reproductions of Muizz Lidin Illah Street, I quite forgot where I was. The poor waiter had to clear his throat three times before I noticed that my attention was being solicited and even then, all I could do is murmur absent-mindedly, "come back tomorrow".

♣ My dear friend Minister of the Environment **Nadia Makram-Ebeid**, is constantly in the news these days, as you may have noticed yourselves. She has just been elected deputy-chief of the Executive Bureau of the Arab Environmental Ministers Council which is headed by Prince **Fahd Ibn Abdallah**

♠ As you probably know I am not one to dwell on the past for long and changing gear –and *toilette* of course, I was suddenly mingling ever so gracefully with 600 guests at **Marie Louis**' winter fashion show, which if the truth be known, attracted almost as many men as women, since what was on offer concerned the chic and the sophisticated of both sexes. Between one miniskirt and another, I managed to spy former minister of of Scientific Research **Venice Gouda** whispering to our Minister of the Environment **Nadia Ebeid**. I bet it was not pollution that was making them so merry.

♥ Recently our own **Rania Saad** and short story writer **Yasser Ibrahim** decided to bring an accidental meeting at the book fair to a happy conclusion by tying the knot, an event celebrated in great pomp at the Omam Restaurant by all their friends and fellow writers. Among the guests were **Son'allah Ibrahim**, of *Dhat*'s (and many others) fame and poet **Abdel-Moneim Ramadan** as well as a number of Rania's colleagues.



Clockwise from top left: Ebeid; Rania and Yasser; Khan El-Khalili,; fashion at Marie Louis

